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Revolver Billy in Texas.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



SUDDENLY BILLY'S REVOLVERS BEGAN TO RATTLE, AND TWO BRAVES WENT REELING OVER THEIR PONIES.

Revolver Billy, IN TEXAS;

OR,

The Lone Star State Rangers.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES OF BUFFALO BILL,"
"WILD BILL," "TEXAS JACK,"
"DR. CARVER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FUGITIVE.

A BAND of horsemen were encamped about a spring that bubbled up in a generous stream from the ground, and was shaded by a score or more of trees that broke the broad expanse of a Texas prairie.

The firelights cast a red glare in a circle about them, and their faces were lighted up brilliantly as they were grouped here and there awaiting the cooking of their evening meal, that several of their number were looking after, and the savory odor of which was sufficient to tempt a sick man to eat a hearty supper.

The men were a wild-looking set, with dark faces, hardened by exposure and stamped with crime.

Their dress and equipments showed them to be Mexicans, and, as they were encamped upon American soil, across the Rio Grande, it was very evident that they could not be there for any good.

Out upon the prairie, in opposite directions, stood two sentinels, upright and silent, and between them and their camp were their horses, staked out to feed upon the juicy grass, and with their saddles and bridles lying near the stake-pins, ready for instant use.

Lying upon his back upon a *serape*, gazing up at the stars, and puffing the smoke of a fragrant *cigarrito*, was the leader of the party.

He was a man who was not of the same class as those about him, for his face was full of refinement, and so perfect in feature that he had an effeminate look which the life he led belied.

He was dressed as a Mexican *caballero*, and his saddle and bridle, which lay near him, were of the finest workmanship, and glittered with silver ornaments.

Suddenly the silence of the camp was broken by a pistol-shot far off upon the prairie.

Instantly the leader of the horsemen was upon his feet, while all stood in expectancy, as a hail came from the sentinel:

"Ho, *senor*, there was a shot out upon the prairie."

"We heard it, *Moro*; but hark!" and the leader bent his ears to listen, looking strangely handsome as he stood there in the full glare of the firelight.

An instant all was silence and watchfulness, and then, upon the prairie, out of the darkness, flashed a weapon.

Then again and again it sent forth its red stream of fire, until twelve shots had been fired.

"That man is in close quarters and the flashes show that he was standing at bay.

"Ha! there is another, and another, and he is now flying along swiftly and comes in this direction.

"Stand ready, men, for we know not what we have to meet.

"To your horses all!"

The leader had spoken in Spanish, his voice ringing out sharp and stern, and the men sprung for their ponies, threw on their bridles and saddles, formed a line across the front of the timber, and in a minute were ready with arms in hand to greet a foe.

That the one who had rattled off the shots so rapidly had been in full flight when he emptied his last revolver, was very evident, for the flashes came from some one who was riding rapidly along, and his course was toward the timber, so that those encamped there would soon know just what they had to fear.

A few moments had they stood in watchful expectancy when the rapid fall of hoofs was heard, and the sound told their practiced ears that the rider was heading directly for the camp.

There was heard the thud of other hoofs, further off, as though the one in advance had pursuers hot upon his track.

Nearer and nearer came the horseman, and riding straight for the timber, as though hoping for succor there against those who came swiftly upon his trail.

Nearer and nearer he drew, until suddenly there came in sight the forms of a horse and rider, flying along like some dark phantom of the prairie.

A minute more he was close upon the timber, while in his rear were visible his pursuers, a mass of horsemen huddled close together.

"Ho, Rangers, I am hot pressed by half a hundred Comanches," sung out a boyish voice as the fugitive drew near the timber, and then he cried:

"Be ready for them for I have led them into your ambush."

The next instant he dashed into the shadow of the timber, to suddenly find his bridle-reins seized upon either side by strong hands that brought his horse back upon his haunches,

while he was grasped by the legs and nearly drawn from his saddle.

"You are my prisoner, *senor*," said a stern voice in his ear.

"In a hornets' nest, by the Star of Texas," cried the fugitive, and as quick as a flash two shots rung out and the men who held his bridle-rein dropped dead.

But, with bitter curses others threw themselves forward and the brave rider was dragged from his saddle and his horse secured.

"Do not harm him, but bind him securely, and then turn to face yonder crowd that is coming upon us," sternly ordered the chief in Spanish; and his men quickly rallied into position once more, just as half a hundred Indians swept down upon them with hideous yells that made the prairies ring.

CHAPTER II.

THE BATTLE IN THE TIMBER.

THE body of horsemen encamped in the timber, and to which the fugitive had fled for shelter, to find himself in the lion's den, did not number more than twenty men.

But armed and mounted splendidly as they were, and looking like men who were accustomed to face death daily, they felt themselves more than equal to any foes they might meet, even if double their numbers.

Seeing the Comanches charging upon them, they hastily formed their line and stood dismounted, sheltered by trees, with their horses in the background and their chief where he could keep his eye upon them.

Every man had his rifle ready, and only waited the order to fire.

The camp fires had been hastily put out, and now all was darkness in the timber as well as upon the prairie.

Straight toward the timber the Comanches were riding at full speed, yelling as they came on, and certainly expecting to meet only a small force to oppose them.

Back in the timber was the prisoner, bound between the two men he had shot, and one of whom was dead, the other dying.

It was a ghastly way to secure a prisoner, but these men little cared for that, and were anxious to be ready to meet their foes that were almost upon them.

As the Comanches came on without hesitation, contrary to their usual style of reconnoitering, it looked as if they, too, were mistaken in the character of those in the timber, or at least did not suspect their numbers.

"Men, those red devils intend to make a bold charge, so let no man waste a shot, for if they break our line we have but flight left," said the leader calmly.

The men answered with a low word in response, and as the Comanches—as their

war-cries now told their foes they were—had come within easy range, the chief of the horsemen at bay gave the command:

"Fire!"

Eighteen rifles flashed almost as one weapon, so well-trained were the men who used them, and down went ponies and red riders in one confused mass.

Instantly the hideous yells ceased, the charge was brought to a sudden halt, and every rider sought safety by throwing himself upon the other side of his horse.

It was evident that they were surprised, and they gazed almost panic-stricken at the dozen men and ponies that the deadly fire had brought down.

But those in the timber remained grim and silent over their triumph, and hastily reloading their weapons, again stood ready.

"Fire!"

Once more their leader's voice rung out, and again a number of red flashes ran down the line of timber, and the leaden hail was hurled upon the mass of warriors and horses, who were just preparing for another charge.

Again was dread havoc done, and in dismay the Comanches turned to fly, when loud burst the cry of the men in the timber.

But their cry of triumph was quickly silenced by one from the red-skins, as up to their foes dashed another band of horsemen, whose war-cries told but too well that they were more of the tribe, and as though realizing the strength, or rather weakness of the whites, they came on with a rush, giving courage to those who were demoralized, and taking them along with them in the charge.

The leader of those in the timber was a man to act promptly, and he saw at a glance that he and his would be overpowered, and all slain, or worse still, kept for torture.

"To your horses all!" he shouted in trumpet tones as soon as another volley had been fired.

Quickly he sprung to the side of his horse, threw himself into the saddle, and darted away, his example followed by his men, though several went down beneath a shower of arrows that were sent into the timber after them.

Through the *motte* they dashed, out upon the prairie, and away like the very wind, their splendid horses giving them hope, for they knew that few Indian ponies could keep up with them.

And in hot chase the red-skins went, tearing through the timber like mad, and striking the prairie hot on the trail, to suddenly draw rein, wheel, and dart back as wild yells were heard, which all Indians on the Texas border knew but too well came from the dreaded Texas Rangers.

Galloping over the plain toward the scene of combat, the Texas Rangers had come between the flying Mexicans and the Indians, and instantly charged upon the latter, believing in the darkness that those who were the fugitives were a band of rancheros or cowboys.

In hot haste the red-skins now in turn fled, and close on their heels charged the Rangers, dashing through the timber, where lay the poor prisoner, still bound, between the dying and the dead, and who had beheld the Mexicans sweep over him in their flight, their foes follow and then retreat, and then the Texans in their headlong rush, all threatening to trample him under the hoofs of their flying steeds.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY MIRANDA.

"WELL, Billy Miranda, this is the worst scrape you ever got yourself in, and your revolvers won't help you now."

The speaker was the prisoner, bound between the two dead bandits, for the second one had now also passed to the "Great Beyond," his spirit having been hastened from his body by the iron hoof of a steed that struck him squarely on the head, as the Texans came through the timber in pursuit of the flying Indians.

The voice of the speaker was boyish, but there was no tremor in the tones, no quivering at the awful position he found himself in.

Just then a fagot from the quickly-scattered camp fire of the bandits, flickered into a flame, and sent shadows dancing about like huge phantoms.

The light also illumined the scene, and displayed a ghastly sight, for side by side lay three human forms.

One of these three was alive, and the face was that of a mere boy.

Yes, a boy, but one whose every feature was cut in a way that showed resolution, nerve and daring far beyond his years.

He was a handsome lad, of perhaps fifteen, though rather small in stature for his age, and with dark-blue, laughing eyes, long, curling hair, and a wiry, athletic figure that denoted both strength and endurance.

He was dressed in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt, moccasins, and wore on his head a black slouch hat pinned up in front with a gold star.

About his waist was a belt, and in it were a pair of handsome, gold-mounted revolvers, which his captors in their haste had neglected to take.

With a grim look he glanced first at one of the dead bandits and then at the other.

They were both rough-looking Mexicans, and one of them had a bullet wound in his breast, the blood from which had stained his hunting-

shirt, while the other's skull had been crushed by the iron shoe of the horse that had trod upon him.

"Well, you are not pleasant company, that's a fact.

"But I guess you won't be quarrelsome," said the boy, as he looked upon those to whom he had been securely bound by raw-hide lariats, each of his feet being bound to one of the bandits, and his arms to theirs also in a way he found it impossible to free himself of.

"Now let me see just what has happened, and then I can study up some way of getting out of this scrape, for if I stay here long the coyotes will come and eat me up with these two Greasers.

"It strikes me I scouted just a little too near those Comanches, and when I ran upon that Injun sentinel, I thought it was all up with me.

"But didn't I get teetotally fooled, when I struck for this timber, expecting to find the boys here, and run into a hornet's nest?

"Well I should remark that I did; but Captain Sam* said he would camp here, and here was where I'd find him.

"It was a little mistake, that was all, for I found here the pards of those two dead Greasers, and if they don't belong, or *did*, to the Mexican bandits, they can set me down for a fool.

"Blue blazes! but wasn't I upset in my calculations?

"But I got in a little work, and I'm anchored to two of a kind, which is not pleasant.

"Then the Comanches sailed in, got it hard, but with reinforcements sent the Greasers flying, and my hair rose up like quills, when I found I was to be left to Mister Lo once more.

"But I heard the yell of Captain Sam, and next, back go the reds, and helter-skelter rode the boys after them, not a soul noticing me, though I sung out lively.

"Now I know Captain Sam won't let up in his chase until he runs the red wolves to their den, and it's not likely I'll have any one to help me out of this excepting Billy Miranda, so here goes to depend on him alone."

As he spoke the brave boy began to twist and turn, in a vain effort to free himself.

But it was to no purpose, for he had been bound most securely, and soon came to the conclusion that he could not get rid of his bonds and his ghastly companionship.

Still the boy's nature did not allow him to yield to despair, as his words indicated, for he said coolly, and in his off-hand, reckless way:

"No go, Billy, for you can't get away. I wish some coyote would come along and chew me loose from these Greasers, for I don't like this, that is certain.

* Major Sam S. Hall—Buckskin Sam—at that time commanding a band of Rangers.—THE AUTHOR.

"Ah! there goes the flame, and all is darkness now, so look out for ghosts.

"Ha! that coyote howls as though he was calling his pards to supper, and I guess he is; but I'll give him a scare if he comes nosing around me. And coming he is, and more of them too!

"I guess, Billy, it's all up with you," and the plucky boy arose on one elbow and gazed with a feeling of horror upon three coyotes that just then came snarling toward him.

CHAPTER IV.

A LEAP FOR LIBERTY.

It was certainly a most horrifying situation for a human being to be in, and the wonder is that Billy Miranda, as my young hero is known, could still keep his senses and not find reason leaving him, when he beheld the wolves approaching him and found himself unable to move hand or foot to defend himself.

But the boy had a world of pluck and a heart that did not despair under any circumstances, and he was not one to give up while life lasted.

"Get out, you snarling brutes!" he shouted, "and wait until I am dead. Begone, I say!"

But the coyotes, cowardly beasts that they are, seemed to realize that the boy was wholly in their power, and growling savagely, they came nearer and nearer to him.

A sudden movement of his body sent them yelping away, but seeing that he did not follow them, they came quickly back again, yelping with anticipated delight at the feast before them and their number augmented to a dozen or more.

As they sat in a semicircle around the boy, howling, showing their teeth, and snapping at each other viciously, Billy called out again:

"Get, you yelping pests, and have the decency to wait until I am as dead as these two Greasers to whom those devils bound me, before you begin your feast."

But the coyotes, emboldened by increasing numbers, set up a chorus howl, and seemed to have no idea of waiting for the plucky youth to die, for they began to narrow their circle, evidently with the intention of rushing in upon their prey.

"Oh, but this is a fearful death to die!" groaned the boy, and then he added, with something of his old recklessness of manner:

"You may enjoy the feast, you howling brutes, but when the Rangers know that you ate me up, they'll not leave one of you on the prairies.

"Ah! they'll know me by my rags and weapons, for you can't eat up Billy's revolvers, though I only hope you'll try just to get a little lead in you.

"Begone! begone!"

He shouted the last words in almost a frenzy, for the coyotes were rushing to the attack.

But suddenly there came a flash, just as the brutes were almost upon him, then several shots were rattled off in quick succession, and a horseman dashed upon the scene, while the enraged and disappointed prairie scavengers scattered in every direction.

"Ho, boy, that is you is it?" said a deep voice in good English, though with an accent.

"It is what is left of me; but I thank you for saving me from those infernal hyenas," said Billy.

"Your fate may be even worse, boy, than dying by their fangs; but you are the youngster I captured to-night, and then had to run off and leave," and the horseman threw himself from his saddle and approached the boy.

"Yes, I am the boy you captured, for I recognize you now."

"Ah! you know me then?" quickly said the horseman.

"I know you to be the one who nabbed me early in the evening, and then ran off, leaving me tied to these two stiffs."

"It is not a pleasant position to leave a man in, let alone a boy, and I am glad I came back here.

"You see, I dropped a belt of gold here to-night, when I ran off, and I came back to look for it, little dreaming I would find you here.

"But let me find the belt, and then I'll talk to you."

"Oh, I don't care to have you talk to me; but I wish you would let me go."

"I cannot think of it."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, you are a youngster that I have often wished to capture, and in the next, I can use you."

"No, you can't use me."

"Well, we will see about that; but now let me set you free, for some of your Ranger pards may come back at any moment."

"I am afraid not, and I only wish they would, for you'd get out of this in quick time, now wouldn't you, Greaser?"

"Boy, curb your tongue, or it may get you into trouble.

"Now tell me who you are?" and having disarmed the boy, the Mexican cut his bonds and set him free, though he kept him covered with a revolver.

"Did you ever hear of Revolver Billy?"

"Yes, often, and he is as good a scout and fighter as any man in the Ranger band."

"You are saying a good deal, for there are some good men among Major Sam's Rangers."

"Granted; but the boy is the equal of any one of them."

"Thank you."

"What for?"

"Oh, I'm Revolver Billy."
 "You?"
 "Yes."
 "I might have known it."
 "But you didn't."
 "No, but I do now, and I tell you, boy, I have captured a treasure in you."
 "A healthy treasure I am; but where does the treasure come in?"
 "I'll keep you as a hostage, for I know well what the Rangers think of their young pard, Revolver Billy."
 "Better let me go."
 "Never!"
 "That's a long time."
 "You'll find it so before I am through with you, boy; but come, march before me to where my men are waiting, and then— Hal! here is my belt now, so I'm doubly in luck," and the Mexican stooped to pick up the belt, against which his foot had struck, giving back a ringing sound, when with the leap of a panther Revolver Billy sprung upon him, his feet striking him squarely on the head, and knocking him down half-stunned by the blow.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOY PRISONER.

THERE is little doubt but that, boy though he was, Billy would have gained the advantage over the Mexican, for he had the surprise and knock-down in his favor, and his blow temporarily stunned the man, so that he could offer no decided resistance to his weapons being taken from his belt.

But, just as Revolver Billy grasped the weapon he so loved, a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder and he was dragged backward with terrific force, while a knife gleamed above him.

"Hold! Moro, do not kill him," cried the Mexican chief, now springing forward and seizing the uplifted hand of the man who had so fortunately for him come to his relief.

"No, he wants to keep me as a curiosity," growled Billy, who, seeing that resistance was vain against such odds, calmly submitted to his fate.

"The boy is a devil, senor," said the Mexican whom his chief had called Moro.

"I know it well, Moro, for he was upon me like a chaparral tiger the first chance he got."

"He is known as Revolver Billy," continued Moro.

"Yes, I have heard of him."

"He is the Boy Ranger, senor, and the worst of the lot, if he is not a man."

"I can do a man's work sometimes, Senor Moro," put in Billy, who spoke Spanish perfectly, and his accent was so pure that the chief turned quickly toward him and asked:

"Boy, are you an American?"

"Yes."

"You are not a Mexican then?"

"No, and I would be sorry if I was."

"*Caramba!*" ejaculated Moro, while the chief said:

"Well, we but lose time here, and you must go with me, for ten to one those wild friends of yours will be back here to look you up, and I have no desire to meet the Texas Rangers."

"There are more like you, senor; but you need not hurry off on my account, as the boys do not know I've gotten into such bad company, and besides, they are on the trail of the Comanches now, and they have a way of sticking to a track to find its other end, as you will some day find out, I'm thinking."

"Boy, you are too glib with your tongue," angrily said the Mexican.

"Well, you've got my hands and feet tied, so my tongue is all I've got now to wag."

"I'll stop its wagging with a gag soon."

"Don't do it, for I'll be as dumb as an owl by day; but which way are you going?"

"I thought you were going to keep quiet."

"Ah! I forgot; but it's natural for me to wish to know where I'm going."

"You'll find that out soon."

"I hope so," and Billy was led to the edge of the timber and placed upon the back of one of two horses that were there, and which Moro had been holding when he came to the aid of his chief.

Springing into the saddle before the boy Moro turned the head of his horse across the prairie, and his chief having mounted they set off at a rapid gallop.

A ride of ten minutes brought them to another bunch of timber, and here the remainder of the band were waiting them.

"I feared trouble for you, captain," said one of the men coming forward.

"No, we were delayed catching this boy Tartar."

"Ah, you found him then as we had left him, senor?"

"Yes; but where is his horse?"

"We have him here, senor."

"Then lead him up and tie the boy upon him, for we must be off."

"We have lost precious time, senor, and stirred up those hornets, the Texan Rangers."

"I know that well, Lute, so shall not go on to-night, but will wait for a better opportunity, and our young prisoner here will be of vast service to us."

"Ah, I understand, senor chief, and I think you are right, if he can be made to talk."

"He must talk, ay, he *shall* talk," was the significant answer of the chief.

Revolver Billy was then placed upon his own horse, for the bandits had brought his

mustang with them in their flight, and all stood ready to move.

"Which way, chief?" asked Lute, who was the guide of the band.

"Back across the Rio Grande," was the reply.

"That settles me, and I am a goner," muttered Revolver Billy as the party set off at a rapid canter, the guide leading, and the chief following close behind with his boy prisoner by his side, and bound securely to his saddle.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD RANGER'S STORY.

To better acquaint my readers with the brave youth, who had thus fallen into the clutches of a band of Mexican robbers, who, he had every reason to believe, would be wholly merciless toward him, I will go back a few years and present to them a scene in which he was a participator when but seven years of age, and the memory of which he could never efface from his heart and brain.

In fact, it was to this scene only that Billy looked back, it seeming to have so impressed him as to wipe out all remembrance of the few years of his life which had gone before.

When questioned as to his past, Billy had little to say, more than that his parents had been slain by Indians, and that he had been found by some Texas Rangers a day or two after, and they had brought him up.

To let the reader know just what had occurred, I will ask him to follow me into the camp of Sam Hall's Rangers, some hours after their charge upon the Indians, and when they had halted to rest their tired horses, after a hot chase of the Comanches.

Seeing that the red-skins had scattered in small bands of half a dozen each, Sam Hall had called a halt until daylight, remarking:

"Then, boys, we will strike some of the trails left by the reds and follow them to sunset."

"Yes, cap'n; but don't you think thar is a duty we owes to a pard, afore we raises red-skin ha'r?" asked an old Ranger, whose white hair and beard had gained him the name of Grandpop, but who answered also to the appellation of Dan Hunter.

A prairie man for forty years, a man of indomitable courage, and one who never went back upon a friend or let up upon a foe, Dan Hunter was respected by all who knew him as he was.

He had a small ranch, where he raised a few cattle and lived in loneliness, with only an Indian boy for his companion and to look after his stock when the Ranger was off with his band, which was very nearly all the time, for those were days of danger along the Rio Grande.

He had been a member of the Ranger band for a number of years, fought hard for Texas, and hated a Mexican as he did a snake.

When Sam Hall organized a band of Rangers in his region, Dan Hunter had at once joined him, and then it was that he had gained the name of Grandpop.

There were many who wished to make him an officer; but this Grandpop would not hear to, but his advice was always sought, and he held the esteem of all the Rangers, from Captain Sam down.

"What! did we lose any of our boys, Grandpop, when we made the charge?" asked Sam Hall quickly, as he sprung from his saddle upon reaching a good camping-place.

"No, Sam, we didn't lose any then; but has you forgot Billy?"

"No indeed, and we must surely look him up, for he was due in that very timber *motte*, where we struck the reds just at sunset."

"Yes, Sam, and we found there traces o' a camp-fire, and nigh onto a hundred reds, with a lot o' horsemen running like rabbits from 'em."

"Perhaps Billy was with these horsemen."

"I hopes not, Sam."

"Why, were they not rancheros?"

"They might have been."

"Then where was the danger of being with them?"

"They didn't strike me as being Texans."

"Hal you believe they were Mexicans?"

"Waal, they kinder had that look to my old eyes, Sam, and there was too much jingle to 'em for our boys."

"By the Lone Star, but you are right, Grandpop."

"I was foolish to let the boy go on a scout, when I knew there were so many Indians about; but then I knew his horse could out-run any Indian pony, and Billy always turns up right."

"You did right, Cap'n Sam; only the boy struck suthin' he didn't bargain for, in my mind it do seem so."

"Grandpop, you know more than you will tell," said Captain Sam, as his men familiarly called him, impressed by the manner of the old man.

"No, I am willing to tell all, Sam."

"Then let us have it, Dan."

"Waal, I may be gittin' old and narvous-like; but it did strike me, Sam, when we charged through them woods, that I heard Billy calling to me."

"Indeed?"

"I hopes it was Billy himself; but I fears it was his ghost."

"Good God! do you mean the boy is dead?"

"Waal, I don't like thet piece o' timber, Sam, for it was right thar thet I came

across the scene that I can't wipe out o' my mind."

"What scene, Grandpop?"

"You know that eight year ago I found that boy Billy on the prairie?"

"Yes."

"Waal, it were in that timber that I comed upon the burnt wagons, the dead bodies of the folks that had composed the train, and a more sickening sight I never seen."

"I didn't know any of 'em; but I heerd they was settlers that was going back into a kentry whar thar wasn't so much killing and scalping, for they had settled too near ther Rio Grande fer the'r own good."

"Thar was some two dozen of 'm, I guesses; but I digs graves for 'em all, druv off ther coyotes an' howlin' wolves, and planted 'em."

"Then I struck off across the prairie on my way back to my ranch, when all of a suddint, you knows, I comed upon a leetle boy a-hidin' in ther grass like a partridge."

"He had seen me coming and he jist hided."

"Waal, I called to him ter show his head, and then out he come."

"Yer knows ther boy, so I needn't tell yer he were a beauty, Sam, for he were."

"But I talks to him and found out that he had been one of the train."

"He looked white and scared, and couldn't tell me much more than that his people had been killed, and an Indian warrior had put him behind him on his horse, and was going off with him, when he slipped off over ther animile's haunches and lay still in ther grass."

"One day passed, and a night followed, and next arternoon I found him, so you kin tell what the boy suffered in thet time."

"You knows, Sam, thet I tuk him to my layout and riz him, teachin' him all I could, and how one day he saved your life, when a cowboy was lying hid for you, and how you tuk him inter your band, and thet I jined too."

"Yes, Grandpop, I know all this, and I am so attached to the boy, that I would risk life every day to save him."

"And right you are, Cap'n Sam, and so would any one o' your thirty Rangers."

"But now comes the idee in my mind."

"Well, Dan?"

"It was in thet timber thet I found the massacred train, and thar is whar they lies buried, but whether thet boy knows it or not, is more than I kin tell you."

"But, Sam, to-night, when we charged through ther timber, I distinctly heerd Billy's voice a-cryin' out."

"Indeed, Grandpop?"

"Fact I did."

"What did he say?"

"He called out:

"Grandpop! Ho, boys, come to my rescool Rangers this way! Help me! help me!"

"I heerd them cries distinct, Sam, and now fears thet they comed from Billy's ghost."

"God grant the boy be not dead, Grandpop," said Sam Hall, impressively, and from the Rangers gathered around came a fervent:

"Amen!"

"Well, boys, we will get what rest we can, and be ready at dawn to look up Billy, and woe be to those who have harmed him," said Captain Sam, and the tired Rangers at once turned in to snatch what rest they could during the few hours of darkness left to them."

CHAPTER VII.

RANGERS TRAILING.

THE dawn was just breaking when the band of Rangers, giving up all idea of trailing the red-skins further, turned back to look up the lost boy, the pet of their band.

Their first move was to return to the timber, where the charge had been made, and see if they could discover any trace there of the missing boy.

If not, they would return to the spot where he had left them the morning before, and striking his trail, follow it wherever it might lead.

A ride of a couple of hours brought them to the timber, and a halt was at once called for breakfast, as the place would be thoroughly searched.

The horses were staked out, and while several men set to work to prepare breakfast, the rest of the party at once began to search the timber!

Captain Sam kept near Dan Hunter, feeling assured that the old Ranger would discover some trace of the boy, if any was to be found.

"Waal, Sam, see here," he said, as he walked over to the edge of the timber, where the bandits had been camped the night before, at the time Billy had ridden into their midst.

"There are the remains of a camp-fire, I see, Grandpop," said Captain Sam.

"Yas, and ther fire was not built by Indians."

"No."

"Fact, as you kin see, knowin' signs on ther prairie as well as me."

"No, no, Grandpop, we all yield to you in prairie knowledge; but there was warm work here, it looks like."

"Yas, it was hot, and checks was called in; but yonder is dead meat," and old Dan pointed to a thicket some yards distant, where were visible objects that looked like human forms.

Quickly they walked to the spot, passing

here and there a dead warrior and a couple of ponies.

Then they came upon two bodies with lariats about them, as though they had been bound.

Near them lay several dead wolves, and there were tracks about that showed that some exciting scene had occurred there.

"Well, Dan, what do you make of all this?" asked Captain Sam.

"You have your idee, Sam?"

"Yea."

"Name it."

"There were Mexicans encamped here."

"Yas, for them two stiff is dead give-aways to what t'others was."

"They were attacked by the Comanches?"

"Them hoof-tracks shows that, with dead ponies and warriors lying round."

"And the Mexicans ran off?"

"Fact."

"And those were Mexicans we took for Texans?"

"Yas, Sam."

"Well, that is all I see just now from the signs about."

"I sees more."

"I do not doubt it, Grandpop, for you can see further into a mill-stone than any man in Texas."

"Thankee, Sam, for ther flatter you give me; but I kin see far as anybody."

"Well, Grandpop, what do you see now?"

"There is Mexicans," and old Dan pointed to the two dead bodies.

"Yea."

"They is some of Don Bocaro's band."

"Ha! how do you know that they belong to that band?"

"Don Bocaro's men all have a gold cord lariat around their sombreros."

"True, and there are their hats with the cords."

"Yes, Sam."

"Well, what can that gang of Greasers have been doing here so far from the Rio Grande?"

"They meant mischief, Sam."

"No doubt of that, Grandpop; but what else do you see in the signs about?"

"Waal, these Mexicans was killed afore our charge, and afore ther Injuns came on 'em, too."

"How do you tell that, Dan?"

"You see they was tied?"

"I do."

"Then thar is a bullet-wound in thet Greaser's head was made by a revolver."

"True."

"Comanches don't hev revolvers."

"That is so, Grandpop."

"Then this Greaser," and Dan touched the

body with his foot, "was marked by an iron-shod hoof."

"So I see, Grandpop."

"We charged right over 'em, and one of our horses did it, and then it was that I heerd ther boy cry."

"You don't mean to say that he was hurt?"

"I don't know, Cap'n Sam, as to what was ther matter."

"But it do look to me as though he were captured by them Greasers, and they had him here when the Injuns fought 'em, and they took him off with 'em when they had to run."

"Yer see them fellers is tied with lariats, and ther ropes shows that they has been out."

"Yea."

"Now, ef them fellers was dead no durned fool w'u'd tie 'em ter keep 'em from gittin' away."

"But my idee is thet thar was another feller tied to 'em, for so it do look to me, for here are places whar he hev struggled hard ter git away."

"Well, Dan, you do seem to be on the right trail, for all your surmise looks clear enough when you read it from the signs."

"Now, you think this was the boy they had here?"

"Waal, we'll see ef we kin git any signs ter tell us who it were."

"Pards," and old Dan called to several of the Rangers near.

"Now, you jist hunt round fer any signs 'o Billy, fer you knows his tracks and ther hoof-marks o' his horse well."

Thus urged the Rangers set to work, and it was but a very short while before tracks were discovered which all presumed to have been made by Billy's horse.

Then a separate trail of two horses was taken up, and as it led in the direction which the band of Mexicans had taken, old Dan said:

"Waal, pards, we has got on ther trail, and like as not we'll find Billy at t'other end; but whether dead or alive thar are no telling."

"Now, let us surround ther grub, and then we'll be ready to continue our observations, and maybe thar won't be musie ef we finds them Greasers hev bagged ther boy or kilt him."

Half an hour after, with old Dan and Captain Sam Hall riding in the lead, the Texas Rangers were following the trail of the Mexican bandits.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY A TIN-UP TOLD.

WITH such readers of prairie signs as men like old Dan and Captain Sam Hall, there was a plain story told of how Billy had been caught by the bandits.

They followed the trail of the two horses, while others went on that of the main body of bandits, and met in the timber where the outlaws had encamped for the second time the night before.

There the hoof-tracks of Revolver Billy's horse were distinctly seen, and the Rangers pressed on rapidly, feeling assured now that the boy was a prisoner.

They all knew well the stories told of Mexican bandits and their barbarity, and often had they pursued and fought them.

Don Bocaro they knew to be a Mexican at the head of a band of followers, who had often raided upon Texan soil, and from whom little mercy was expected by those who fell into his clutches.

The sworn foe of the Rangers, the comrades of Revolver Billy feared the worst for the poor boy, for they were aware that his years would be little protection to him.

They therefore pressed rapidly on the trail left by Don Bocaro and his men, though with little hope of coming upon them ere they could get across the Rio Grande.

"Better strike for Donaldson's Rangers, Cap'n Sam, and all push across the river, ef we finds the outlaws has crossed with the boy," suggested old Dan, as they rode swiftly along following the trail without any difficulty.

"Yes, Dan, it will be a good idea, for Donaldson has some fifty men, and will willingly join us; and maybe we can get a few rancheros also, and that will give us nearly a hundred brave fellows."

"Yas; and then Don Bocaro will hev ter hunt cover, for ef we crosses the line we'll go for avenging some o' his acts on this side."

"We will go to the river first, Dan, and then camp there until I send a scout after Donaldson and his men."

"But how far do you think they are ahead of us now?"

The old man glanced at the trail earnestly, and then ahead, his eyes resting upon a clump of timber some miles distant.

"Does yer see thet timber?"

"Yes, Dan."

"Waal, my idee be thet Don Bocaro halted thar for grub."

"Then he is fully four hours ahead of us."

"Like as not, cap'n."

"And we must halt there too, for we are pushing the horses hard."

"Yas; it will do 'em good to rest 'em," and old Dan rode on in silence until he came to the timber which he had pointed out.

There were the remnants of camp-fires there, the ashes being yet warm, which showed that the outlaws had encamped there only a few hours before.

The hoof-tracks of Billy's horse were also

plainly visible where he had been led up to the fire, and then taken some distance off to be staked out.

"The boy are with 'em," said Dan.

"You are sure?"

"Waal, there are ther tracks left by his crittur."

"Yes."

"He were led up to this fire, while no other horse came near."

"There are certainly no other tracks near."

"Yas, cap'n, thar is whar a horse hev been led up too; but it were the same horse."

"I see: you mean that Billy was on his horse, that they brought him here and dismounted for a rest, led his horse away to stake him out, and then brought him back for the boy when ready to start?"

"Cap'n Sam, you has read them signs beautiful, for thet am jist what I does mean."

"It is a great relief to know that Billy is not dead," said Sam Hall.

"It will be a greater relief when we has got him."

"See, thar is whar they put him, and they tied him around the body to this tree— Holy smoke! does yer see this?" and old Dan sprung forward and picked up a tin cup which was half concealed by some grass.

"I do, and it is Billy's, for there are the revolvers he painted on it," said Captain Sam, stretching forth his hand to grasp the tin cup, upon the front of which had been skillfully painted a pair of revolvers, with the words beneath, also well executed:

"BILLY, THE BOY RANGER."

But old Dan drew back, as Captain Sam attempted to take the cup, and said:

"Hold on a bit, Cap'n Sam, for the boy must hev left some other sign fer us."

"This cup tells the story, Dan."

"Yas, and it do tell more, for here are some letterin' scratched on ther bottom with a knife-point, or suthin' sharp, an' as it hes been a durned long time since I figgered out any writin' I'll jist git you to see what Billy hev writ us."

The old man turned the tin cup bottom upward, as he spoke, the act revealing some writing evidently hastily done.

Then aloud Captain Sam read, while the Rangers gathered around him:

"RANGER PARDS:—

"Run into a Mexican camp, thinking it was you.

"They are Don Bocaro and his band, and were going on a raid, but have put back to cross the river.

"I go with them, seeing that I cannot get away.

"Don't follow across the river, for I'll give 'em the alip in some way soon as I can.

"Yours in bad luck,

"REVOLVER BILLY."

"The tin cup tells the story, boys," cried Sam.

"Yas, cap'n, and maybe the boy is right about saying don't cross the river, so we'll not send for Donaldson until we sees what is up, and then, if we can't go over, I'll jist skip off and see what I kin do for ther youngster."

"You will run a fearful risk, Dan."

"Waal, cap'n, I hev run risks for nigh onto fifty years now, and ef I do hand in my chips, it will be in doing a good turn fer Billy, and I'm old enough to die anyhow, while thar be them as wishes I hed turned my toes up years ago."

"But let us tackle grub now, and then push on to the river."

This advice was promptly followed, and the Rangers reached the river banks soon after dark.

"I'll tell yer what I'll do, Cap'n Sam," said old Dan when a halt was called.

"Well, Grandpop?"

"Yen jist hunt a camp ter aide in fer a short time, while I crosses over and sees which way they hev gone, an' ef I kin do anything fer ther boy."

"But you run a fearful risk, Grandpop."

"No I don't, Sam, fer I kin shout that lingo beautiful, and I has a Mexican friend what lives nigh here, or rather some leagues away, and I'll hunt his hacienda afore day-dawn."

"Well, you know best, Dan."

"Yes, and I'll git off as soon as I sees whar you is ter strike a camp."

"If I doesn't come back in a week, you kin jist put me down as lyin' with my toes tarned up and a bullet or knife-wound in me, for I doesn't suppose ther coyotes will gnaw my tough old carkies."

"Now let us hunt a camp, and then, Sam boy, I'll be off, for thet tin cup told us thet Billy were in trouble, an' I'm durned ef I don't git him out o' it, or go 'inter ther same myself," and half an hour after, old Dan Hunter was boldly crossing a ford of the Rio Grande, followed by the good wishes of his Ranger comrades.

CHAPTER IX.

A CAPTIVE'S SHOT.

I WILL now return to Revolver Billy in his captivity, and on the march with his captors toward the land where he knew he would not behold a friendly face.

He, however, kept up his courage, and his seeming recklessness of what might happen to him caused his captors to look upon him with considerable respect.

Don Bocaro, the chief, particularly watched the boy, and soon made up his mind as to what he would do with him.

What his intention was, the story will develop as it progresses.

When the band came in sight of the Rio

Grande it was nearly sunset, and, anxious to cross the river before nightfall, Don Bocaro pushed on rapidly, Lute, the guide, leading.

But suddenly the guide halted, and after a moment of peering steadily ahead of him, he said:

"Senor, there are some horsemen hiding behind yonder sand-hills."

"Indeed, Lute?"

"Yes, senor."

"How do you know?"

"I saw them."

"Well, who are they?"

"That I do not know."

"But you fear they may be some of Donaldson's Rangers?"

"If Donaldson's Rangers have found out that we crossed the river into Texas two days ago, then we may expect them to be waiting for us."

"But they may be Rangers, and they may be Mexican soldiers, while, which is more likely, they may be Indians."

"I little dread the Indians, Lute, and do not care to come in contact with our soldiers, while I certainly would not wish to meet those wild Texans, man for man."

"So what shall we do?"

"Push for the ford and cross in a run, be they whom they may."

"You are right; and the prisoner?"

"Keep him next to you, for you don't wish to lose the boy, senor."

"You are right, for he may be useful some day."

"Yes, senor; he can be made useful to you," was the significant reply.

Turning to his men Don Bocaro told them that there was danger ahead, and for all to follow close together and charge for the ford.

"What have we got to fight, senor chief?" asked Moro, who was a lieutenant in the band.

"I do not know and neither does Lute."

"I do."

"You?" and all looked at Billy Miranda, who had so complacently asserted his knowledge of who was before them.

"Yes."

"How do you know, boy?" asked Don Bocaro.

"From seeing them."

"When?"

"Oh, long before that renegade Texan, who is your guide, saw them," was the cool reply.

"And who are they?"

"Comanches."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes, I saw them ride across the plain, and seeing us, they wheeled quickly and rode back to cover."

"It was when their scouts were looking over the sand-hills at us that the renegade saw them!"

"Boy, don't you call me a renegade again," savagely said the guide.

"I will, for the name fits you, as you are a traitor Texan," was the cool reply of Billy.

"By the—"

"Hold! Lute. I will have none of this, so let the boy alone," called out Don Bocaro, and the guide allowed his knife to drop back in its scabbard, for he had stepped forward with murderous intent toward the prisoner.

Then turning to Billy, Don Bocaro said:

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I am a prisoner, not your guide."

"Yet your life might have been lost had we ridden upon an ambush."

"I have to take my chances of that."

"They are Indians, you say?"

"They wear the costumes of red-skins; but many a white man does wicked deeds under a painted face."

"Well, we will ride on and see what they will do," said Don Bocaro, and the horsemen moved slowly on once more, their eyes fixed upon the distant sand-hill, behind which lurked a dangerous foe.

As they drew nearer the river, the guide suddenly diverged from the trail, straight toward the bank, as though to follow it up to the ford and thereby avoid passing by the sand-hills.

Instantly it was evident that those behind the hills saw that they would thus be thwarted in having the Mexicans ride into an ambush, for out from their hiding-place suddenly darted a large number of horsemen.

"Indians! and Comanches at that."

"Ride hard for the river-bank, men, and once there we cannot be surrounded," cried the chief.

Straight for the river-bank the party rode, knowing that with the river upon one side the Indians could only attack from the front, and by moving slowly along, fighting as they went, they could gain the ford and cross the river where their foes would not follow them.

Arriving at the bank, Don Bocaro placed his men in line, and then turning to Revolver Billy, said:

"Boy, I don't wish to have you under fire, with no arms in your hands to defend yourself, so I am willing to set your arms free, if you will make me a promise."

"What promise do you wish me to make you?" asked Billy.

"That you will not attempt to escape from me."

"Will you believe me if I promise you?"

"Yes."

"Then I make the promise."

"And I will set you free."

"Here, rub your hands to get up circulation, and here are your own revolvers, which

report says you can use as well as any man on the border," and Don Bocaro placed in Billy's hands his own weapons.

The boy grasped them as though they were old and dear friends, and then turned to glance at the coming red-skins.

There was quite a number of them, and they were dashing on swiftly with yells that were horrifying and deafening, while they were preparing to shower arrows upon their enemies as soon as they came within range.

"Now you've got your weapons, boy, don't shoot me in the back during the fight," growled Lute the guide.

"You judge me by yourself, man; but I shall watch you close, and if I see any crooked work toward me, I'll pull trigger on you, if there's a red within a yard of me," and Billy glanced at his revolvers to see that they were all right, while the guide, with a Spanish oath, turned his attention to the danger confronting them.

"Now, men, ready with your rifles!" called out Don Bocaro, and the weapons were raised.

Just then a shower of arrows came from the charging red-skins, and a few of the barbs struck horses and men—wounding them however very slightly.

Then came the ringing command:

"Fire!"

The well-trained outlaws fired as almost one man, and their aim was deadly.

But the red-skins, though staggered, came rushing on, with wilder yells, and firing rapidly.

"Down rifles and draw revolvers!" shouted Don Bocaro.

"Now I am at home," shouted Billy, and the next minute the revolvers of the outlaws rattled savagely, while the air was filled with arrows.

Shrieks infernal, the neighing of horses, rattle of firearms, trample of hoofs, with stern orders from the outlaw border and Indian chiefs, made the scene now one to remember.

But such close, hot fighting could last but a few minutes, and all felt that one or the other side must give way soon.

Which should it be?

The Indians were in vastly superior numbers, and they were maddened by their loss, which had been heavy.

Then the outlaws fought with rifle and revolver, and to surrender was instant death to them.

Thus both sides battled with desperate fury.

Suddenly Don Bocaro received a stunning blow from a tomahawk hurled at him, and he reeled in his saddle. Before he could recover himself, the Comanche chief dashed up to him, seized him by the hair, and was raising his knife to bury it to the hilt in the broad breast

of the outlaw, when his arm dropped, shattered, to his side, and the blade fell to the ground.

At that instant Billy, all bound as he was to his saddle, spurred alongside the Comanche chief, and placing his revolver close to his head sent a bullet through his brain, while he shouted:

"I want your topknot, Mr. Injun."

The fall of their chief completely demoralized the red-skins, and they turned and fled in dismay, leaving one-third of their warriors and ponies dead or dying upon the field.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE.

"You saved my life, boy," cried Don Bocaro earnestly, as he turned toward Billy, and wiped the blood from his head, where the tomahawk had wounded him.

"Don't mention it," answered Billy, in his off-hand way.

"But I will mention it, and more, I'll tell you that I am your friend now, and not your foe."

"I doubt which is the most dangerous, to have you for a friend or foe."

"I am in earnest, boy."

"Oh, I didn't do anything for you to make a softy of yourself about, for I just saw your hair was in danger of being lifted, so shot the Injun's arm and then sailed in for his life."

"And you did that for me?"

"Not much. I did it for myself, for if you had been killed we would have been wiped out."

"Oh, no, don't you flatter yourself, senior, for I would just as soon, and a little rather, that you should die as not."

The chief muttered something to himself, which Billy did not catch, and then turned to look after his men, several of whom had been killed and nearly half of his band wounded.

"This has been a hot fight for us, Senior Billy," he said, with respect in his tone as he again turned to the boy.

"It was hotter for the reds, and you can bet they are howling mad, and if you take my advice, you won't let darkness catch you on this side of the river."

"You are right, boy, and I will move at once, for if we stay here, they'll charge us again, and we are in no condition to fight."

"Come, men, we must be off at once," and, as the men prepared to move, Don Bocaro turned again to the boy with:

"Revolver Billy, I don't wish to tie you up again, after what you did for me."

"Better let me go and say no more about it."

"The Indians would see you go alone and surely kill you."

"That is my lookout, so don't worry your head about me, but set me free, if you wish to return the favor I did you."

"I do wish to return it, and more; but I cannot let you go."

"That settles it then."

"I am more anxious now to have you with me than ever."

"Oh!"

"But I don't wish to tie you."

"Don't do it then."

"Will you promise not to attempt to escape if I do not?"

"No, I will not, for I kept my promise for the fight, and that is over, so I'll just light out now if I get the slightest chance."

"Then I will have to bind you once more."

"It will be the safest plan if you wish me to remain with you."

"I do wish it, but only wish that you would stay without being bound."

"Not I, for I don't like the gang and the dirty work you do."

"I'm honest, and I belong to a square lot of Rangers, and we are down on thieves and cut-throats, so tie me up and be moving, or you may lose your hair yet, for it's getting dark."

The chief gazed fixedly into the boy's face, and then called to one of his men to tie Billy's hands securely once more.

This was done, and with their wounded strapped on their ponies, and having thrown their dead over the banks into the river, the outlaws moved on once more.

The Indians from their retreat at the sand-hills, watched them closely, and as they moved off at once sought the field to look after their dead, which the Mexicans had left lying where they had fallen, their scalp-locks untouched, excepting the red-skin chief's, which one of the band had cut off and given to Billy.

Several times the Comanches threatened to charge upon the retreating Mexicans, and once came toward them with such determination that Don Bocaro hastily cut the bonds that secured Billy and returned to him his revolvers, with the remark:

"They are coming upon us this time and you will have a chance to do more good work for us."

"I'll do it for myself," answered Billy.

But the Comanches, seeing the outlaws' bold front, drew up their ponies when yet some distance off, and firing a shower of arrows upon the little band, retreated under the volley of rifle shots poured upon them.

Once more then the outlaws rode on, reached the ford, crossed over to the Mexican shore, and seeking a chaparral thicket halted for rest.

Then a cry arose in their midst as their camp-fires illumined the darkness, for nowhere visible was the boy captive.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOY FUGITIVE.

"WELL, he untied me and didn't ask me for a promise this time," chuckled Billy, as he was a second time set free and again grasped his trusty revolvers.

That he might not attract attention, as it was now getting quite dark, Billy quickly put his revolvers out of sight, and wrapping the end of his lariat about one wrist, put his hands behind him to make believe that he was bound.

"Billy Miranda, you've got your guns, your horse, and your arms are free, so if you do not escape within half an hour you are a bigger fool than I take you for, and I'll lose the good opinion I have always had of you," muttered Billy to himself as the party descended into the river.

With the noise of the splashing waters, the yelling of the men to their horses, and the driving of the few loose horses they had with them, the outlaws made a great disturbance in crossing the river, and Billy was not slow to take advantage of this by trying to slip off.

Allowing his horse to drink, while others were passing him, he waited until others went by, and who, in the gloom, mistook him for some of their outlaw comrades.

Then he slowly followed on after them, as soon as he saw the last outlaw disappearing ahead.

"Well, I'm between two fires now, for the Injuns are on yonder bank behind and the outlaws ahead.

"This river is too full of quicksands and death for me to attempt to go either up or down stream, or we might try that on.

"But I guess I'll follow on after the gang, and once they strike the highlands and don't miss me, it will take a lively outlaw to catch Revolver Billy, and I shouldn't wonder if somebody got hurt if they crowd me."

Thus talking to himself, and more frequently addressing his conversation to Billy Miranda than using the personal pronoun, he rode on his way slowly after the Mexicans.

It must be confessed that he grew a little nervous as the band left the river-bed and ascended to the higher lands beyond, for he knew that a few more minutes would decide whether he was free or not.

Up the trail to the ford went the outlaws, making considerable noise, and close behind them followed Billy.

He well knew that if they missed him and turned back that he must be taken, for he had no other alternative, as the Indians surely occupied the other shore, and would capture or kill him did he retrace his steps.

He could not yet turn to the right or left from the trail to the ford, on account of the nature of the land on either side, and he coolly

made up his mind, if the outlaws started back in search of him, to ride on and meet them, as though he had no idea of escaping.

At last the table-lands were reached, and watching closely, Billy saw the last shadowy form of the outlaw band disappear from sight.

"Now, as soon as I can swallow my heart, which I've had in my mouth the past ten minutes, I'll hunt another ford to take me back to Texas," said Billy, and gathering his reins well in hand, and placing his revolvers so that he could quickly grasp them, he rode on, turning sharply to the right, which course would lead him up the river.

The horse he rode was a fine one, and an animal which he had himself caught out of a herd of wild ponies.

It was very evident that the animal was not naturally wild, but had escaped from some ranch, or train, and herding with mustangs, had become almost akin to them.

He was a dark bay, clean-limbed, long-bodied, and the fastest horse in the Ranger corps, as Billy had cause to discover on many occasions.

After a ride of half a mile Billy drew rein, and seemed to be listening most attentively.

"They are still moving, for I hear them; but they'll not go far before they camp, and how they will howl when they find Revolver Billy has not invaded Mexico.

"Oh! if I had the boys near, wouldn't we amaze the Don and his men?

"Why it would be cruel to surprise 'em as we could.

"Well, I rather like that handsome Don, and it would not have been such hard work for me to save his life, even had I not been looking out for number one in doing so.

"He is cruel, they say along the border; but I like his face, and it does seem as though I'd seen it somewhere before; but it bothers me not to know where.

"I hope I won't see it again though, or at least until I have Captain Sam and the boys with me.

"Now won't they wonder when I don't turn up?

"And won't Grandpop cuss and start off at once to look me up?

"Well, I've got to find the boys now, for I don't feel so healthy when I'm alone," and Billy rode on once more, to again come to a sudden halt before he had gone far.

"Ah! they've missed Revolver Billy, and they are just chewing cuss-words by the mouthful.

"I wonder what the Don thinks?

"Well, I know what Billy Miranda thinks, and that is that he had better travel a little faster and not camp until he has put many miles between him and the Don.

"Come, Red Ranger, you've got to travel

if you want to eat grass on Texas prairies again," and he urged his tired horse into a gallop, and sped rapidly up the river-bank, anxious to place as far a distance between himself and his foes, as was possible before dawn, when he was well aware that they could strike his trail, and that they would do so, he did not doubt, from what he knew of Don Bocaro.

CHAPTER X'I.

CAUGHT IN THE COIL.

It was assuredly a surprise, and a painful one, to Don Bocaro, when he discovered that his boy captive had escaped.

He was at first unwilling to believe that he could have done so, thinking it was impossible for him to so cleverly get out from the midst of the band without attracting attention to his act.

Then he remembered that he had himself set his arms free and placed his revolvers in his hand.

"*Santissima!* I did not ask a promise of him that time, I remember, and the cunning boy was quick to take advantage of it.

"I forgot to do so, and in the march here, I did not think it necessary to keep an eye on him, as I did not think of his being free.

"Here, men, who saw that young Texan last?"

"I passed him in the river, senor," said one.

"Yes, he was letting his horse drink, senor, when I saw him last," cried another.

"But his arms were tied behind him, senor," remarked a third.

"No, they were not, for I set them free, and it was his cunning that made him hold them behind him to pretend to still be bound.

"Back to the ford, some of you, and watch it closely.

"Here, Lute, you see if you can strike the boy's trail—no, no, I forgot that you hate him so, and might be only too glad to put a bullet in him.

"You remain in camp, while I go and see if I can find out where he turned off, up or down-stream, for with his horse dripping wet, I can find it with my lantern and perhaps follow it some distance to night, so that by dawn we can push rapidly on in chase," and Don Bocaro set off for the river, at the head of those men whom he had told to act as a guard at the ford.

With the aid of a dark-lantern, which he always carried with him, the outlaw chief soon discovered the trail, left by Billy's horse when he had turned him up the river-bank.

"Ah! he goes up, and not down the stream!

"One of you men go on to the ford and guard it, and the other two come with me," said the chief.

"I better go back to camp, senor, and get a comrade to aid me," said the man selected as sentinel at the ford, not liking the idea of being left alone there.

"As you please, Pinto, and mind you, take the boy alive, if he doubles on us and comes that way."

"Suppose we cannot, senor chief?"

"You must, for if he is killed you shall answer for it."

"Then he may escape?"

"Let him do so, rather than kill him," sternly said Don Bocaro, and he rode on, followed by the three men, while the fourth returned to the camp in the chaparral and got two comrades, instead of one, to go with him to the ford, he telling them that the chief had so ordered.

Taking up a position on the side of the trail, where a bank hid them from view, and yet commanded the approach to the river, they sat down to wait for what would turn up.

Worn out, they soon dropped to sleep, and one of them only awoke when the sound of splashing water fell on his ears.

"Holy Padres! comrades, the boy has passed us while we were asleep, and is crossing the river.

"The chief will stretch our necks," cried the man in alarm.

His words at once brought his companions to a full realization of their situation, and one said:

"Let us give chase."

"It would be useless," responded another.

"We'll stay here and swear he did not pass us," said Pinto.

"Comrade, that horse is crossing toward this shore, not going from it," suddenly remarked one of the men, as his quick ear detected that the sound of splashing water grew louder and not fainter.

All three listened attentively, and were convinced that such was the case.

"We'll take him prisoner, whoever he is," said one.

"Yes, get your lariat ready, Pinto, for you can throw a rope better than any man in the band."

Pinto at once took his lariat from around the horn of his saddle, and curling it for use, stood where he could throw it readily upon any one passing along the trail.

Then the three waited anxiously, and watched closely by the light of the stars to see who it was they had to face.

The splashing of water soon after ceased, and the sound of hoof-falls on the solid ground was heard.

There appeared in view of the watchers the forms of a horse and rider.

Nearer and nearer the horseman came, and

he was watching his course closely and riding slowly.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the ambushed men, until he reached the point opposite to them and passed on. But just then the dark coil shot forth from the strong hand of Pinto, and settled quickly over the shoulders of the horseman.

With a snort of fright the horse bounded forward, and the lariat tightening dragged the rider from his saddle and he fell heavily to the ground, while his captors rushed from their ambush and threw themselves upon him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT BILLY SAW AT THE FORD.

In his scouts with the Texan Rangers, Revolver Billy had learned the banks of the Rio Grande, and its fords, pretty thoroughly, and in fact, had been for weeks off with old Dan Hunter hunting and trapping, until he came to know the country better than some of the professed guides.

Thus knowing the ford where he had crossed with the outlaws, and made his escape, he was aware that there was another crossing some leagues above.

Toward this ford he made his way, determined to push on back into Texas and then camp, feeling that should the outlaws follow him they would not dare cross upon Texan soil unless they were in strong force.

But before Billy had gone very far he discerned that his horse, Red Ranger, was pretty well fagged out.

The horse had had a long and hard ride of it two days before, and then the two nights' work that had followed had used him up.

He saw that Red Ranger was not hurt in any way, only tired, and felt that even a short rest would greatly refresh him.

But dare he stop to give him that rest?

Billy was himself used up, and did so wish to be able to lie down and rest; yet he dared not do so.

At last, seeing that Red Ranger must have rest, the boy argued:

"Well, if I stop now, I may go to sleep and Don Bocaro and his gang overtake me and pounce upon me.

"Then, if I go to the Texas shore, showing Ranger as I must, to do so, should I come upon any red-skins, as I certainly will, why I can't run away, and like as not I'll lose my scalp.

"Now I'd a little rather trust the Don than the Injuns, so I'll call a halt, as Captain Sam says, in the first good place.

"Ah! I have it, for I remember a little thicket where Grandpop and I camped two days once, and there is good water, plenty of grass, and it is but half a mile from the ford.

"Come, Ranger, stir your hoofs, for rest is ahead."

As though thoroughly understanding his young rider, the horse picked up his rate of speed very perceptibly, and in a short while Billy turned off of the trail into a ravine that led to the spot he had selected as a camping-place.

He soon reached it, reconnoitered carefully, and convinced that no one was there before him, he staked Ranger out, after giving him a drink at the spring, and then sat down to eat a piece of jerked meat and a cracker.

He soon found that he was too sleepy to eat, and, seeing that his horse, after a few mouthfuls of grass, had laid down to rest, he said:

"You are right, Ranger, and I know a boy that will do likewise."

Rolling his blanket about him, and with his saddle for a pillow, while his revolvers were close at hand, ready for his grasp if needed, Revolver Billy sunk at once into a deep sleep.

He did not wake up for hours; and when he did so, found that the sun was rising.

"Well, Billy, good-morning! And how are you, Red Ranger?"

"You both wake up alive, I am glad to see, and you, my good horse, seem to have rested well, and been eating your breakfast for some time.

"No Don yet, and I hope he'll not come; but I must not tarry here," and the boy quickly built a fire, threw a piece of jerked meat on to broil, put some coffee in his tin cup, and soon had a good breakfast for one with his keen appetite.

After the meal he saddled and bridled Ranger, and was about to ride out of the ravine leading to the thicket where he had passed the night, when he heard the clatter of hoofs.

Quickly he drew his revolver and waited.

"He is coming this way; but as he is only one, I am not as scared as I may look," muttered the boy.

Patiently he waited, and soon a horse and rider dashed into sight.

"Prairie snakes! but it's a woman!" he cried as a black horse swept by with a woman in the saddle.

"Now she is graceful, and rides like a—a—well, she rides well, and no mistake.

"She's pretty, too, I judge from her looks at this distance; but as there isn't a hacienda within five miles, what is she doing here, and alone?"

"By hooky! but she's going my way, so if I want pleasant company, I'd better be starting, though I won't show myself yet awhile."

So saying, Billy waited until the fair horsewoman had disappeared, around a bend in the

trail, and then he rode slowly on in the direction she had taken.

Arriving at the ford, he saw her crossing toward the other shore, and when she had disappeared from view once more, he again followed on her trail.

Red Ranger seemed almost himself again, and needed no encouragement to move on, while Billy, pleased with his escape, and refreshed by his rest, was in good humor with himself and the world in general.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESCUE.

WHEN he felt that he would not be seen by the woman in his front, Billy crossed the river, and then pushed on more rapidly.

He readily followed the trail of her horse, and felt that he was gaining upon her, when suddenly he heard the crack of a revolver, and then several shots in quick succession, followed by a series of wild yells.

"Injuns!" he cried quickly, and then said:

"Come, Ranger, there is work ahead for us, for I'm thinking the lady is in trouble."

Ranger responded to his master's call, and bounded forward like the wind.

Out of the chaparral thicket he shot like an arrow to come upon a strange and thrilling scene.

There, in an open space lay a dead horse, and standing by him, her riding-habit hanging in graceful folds about her, was the woman whose trail Billy had been following.

In one hand she held a revolver, and that she not only knew how to use it, but had done so with deadly effect, was evidenced by the form of an Indian lying near her, while his wounded pony was struggling in the throes of death not far away from where his dusky rider lay.

But, this was not all, for charging down upon the brave woman, firing their arrows as they came, were four warriors in all the paint and feathers of braves on the war-path.

What the ending would have been was very evident, had not Billy appeared upon the scene.

He was not the one to count odds against himself, and especially if he saw a comrade in need of his aid.

But now, when he saw a woman alone opposed by savages who felt for her no mercy, and beheld her bravely at bay defending herself, he would not have held back had there been a dozen to fight.

His reputation as a shot had gained for him the name of Revolver Billy, and he deserved the name he had won.

The revolvers he carried had been presented to him by the Rangers, and he was proud of them, while they were most superior weapons,

which had saved his life on numerous occasions, and now he would make them save the brave woman at bay.

Who she was, where from, or where going, Billy did not care; enough that she needed his aid, and thus needing it, she should have it.

With his reins between his teeth, a revolver in each hand, and his horse fairly flying over the prairie he dashed to the rescue.

The Indians saw him before the woman did and gave a yell of defiance, for they felt that it was one against four.

But, suddenly Billy's revolvers began to rattle, and to their music two braves went reeling from their ponies—the death-wail on their lips.

Then the two remaining warriors turned in hot haste to fly, while the woman beheld who it was that had come to her rescue.

Like the wind Billy swept on in pursuit, and his revolvers were fired rapidly at the flying red-skins, and he saw that he had wounded one, for the savage let fall his bow and clung to the mane of his pony.

Having seen them well started in flight, Billy wheeled sharply to the right, put his revolvers in their holsters, and then, with his lariat curling around his head, he started toward the mustang of one of the slain warriors.

The animal was a fine one, and, as though willing to give up life in an Indian camp, made little resistance to being caught.

With his pony leading by the lariat, Billy rode up to the woman, as she still stood by her slain horse, and, raising his sombrero, he said:

"I have brought you a horse, senora."

The face that was turned upon him then fairly took his breath away with its beauty.

It was the face of a Mexican woman—one who was beyond her teens and yet hardly looked it.

Her features were perfect, her eyes large, lustrous, shaded by long lashes, and yet within their dark depths there was a look of sadness that seemed to fairly haunt them.

Her form was full of symmetry, and her movements the perfection of grace.

That she was a Mexican aristocrat, no one seeing her could doubt; and her face fairly won Billy's heart at sight.

In a voice strangely rich and soft, she answered:

"You have done far more, young senor, than bring me a horse in place of my poor Hidalgo, for you have saved me from death."

"Ah! you might have stood the red-skins off, senora, for they were weakening under your revolver," said Billy, in his off-hand way.

She shook her head and smiled, while she answered:

"No; my last shot is here, and I had reserved it for myself, intending to take my own life.

"You arrived just in time, young senor, and I pray the Holy Mother to bless you for this day's work, and may Heaven desert me if I forget you!"

"You speak too kindly of my little put-in, senora; but let me throw your saddle upon this pony and then help you to mount, for there are doubtless more Injuns round here, and I have often noticed that if you kill a red, a dozen are around to come to the funeral."

The lady again smiled, and, as Billy was saddling the mustang, which was a very fair animal, she asked:

"How is it I find you here, and alone?"

"I am on my way back to the camp, senora, having been captured by a band of Mexicans; but I am also surprised to find you so wholly unprotected in this wild country."

"Oh, I have always believed myself protected until to-day, with my fleet horse and revolver; but these Indians dashed upon me when I little expected danger, and an arrow brought down my poor horse."

"Do you live near here, senora?"

"Not very far away; and I shall have to ask your escort to my home, where you will be welcome."

"Thank you, senora; but I live a long way from here, and my friends will be anxious about me."

"Well, they will be that more glad to see you by your delay; so come with me, for you look tired out, and your horse also needs rest."

"You live upon Mexican soil, senora?"

"Yes, and you?"

"Am a Texan."

"That is no reason why we should be foes, though your people and mine seem to constantly war with each other."

"Well, let us not talk of that, but say you will come with me."

"I had rather not, senora."

"Do not say that, for I am really unnerved by the scene I passed through, and need your services as an escort greatly."

"Under those circumstances, senora, I will go," answered Billy, who was at heart very glad to get a chance for a rest in a comfortable hacienda, and aiding the lady to mount, he then sprung upon Ranger, and the two rode back toward the Rio Grande, the boy keeping a bright lookout for danger ahead.

CHAPTER XV.

PINTO'S PRISONER.

WITH his dark-lantern, Don Bocaro was enabled not only to strike the trail of Revolver Billy, but to follow it slowly, and he pressed

on for some distance upon it, until tired human nature and horse-flesh both demanded rest.

Then he halted and went into camp for the couple of hours yet left until dawn.

Still weary, both horses and riders began their journey again at daybreak, and it was some hours after when they came to the scene of Billy's encampment.

"The boy is taking his comfort, that is certain; but he is just that kind of a youth," said the Don, as he saw evidences of the camp fire and breakfast.

After pushing on a short while longer, they came to the ford, and seeing that Revolver Billy had crossed, the Don gave up the chase, and, with a sigh of disappointment turned his horse away from the river.

Feeling the need of rest, and having given his lieutenant orders what to do, should he not return, the Don and his men sought a grove of timber, and after a slight breakfast, turned in for a rest of a few hours.

It was after noon when the Don was awakened by the sound of voices, and springing to his feet he descried his own men winding slowly along the trail on their way to their stronghold, still some leagues distant among the hills.

Hailing them he called a halt for the noon-day meal, and, as the men filed into the timber, he discovered that Pinto had a prisoner.

Advancing quickly toward him, he beheld a man of imposing presence, large stature, and with long white hair and beard.

The prisoner was dressed in buckskin, but wore top boots and a sombrero.

He was well mounted, and his arms, a rifle, knife and pair of revolvers, had been taken from him by Pinto.

"Well, Pinto, who have you there?" asked the Don as he advanced toward the Mexicans and their prisoner.

"He is a Texan Ranger, senor, whom we caught at the ford last night while lying in wait for the boy," answered Pinto.

"Ah! and you captured him without trouble?"

"With my lariat, senor, I caught him and pulled him out of his saddle."

"He is a quick one, and very strong for his years; but we had him before he could do much damage, except kill Pedro."

"Ah, yes; but if he had killed you it would have been different, I suppose you think, as far as the damage was concerned?" said Don Bocaro with a sneer.

Pinto remained silent at this rebuke, while the chief went on to say:

"That boy killed two of my men over in Texas, this man has slain another, and the Indians slew several more, besides wounding half a dozen."

"Why, if this keeps up, I'll lose half of my band in a day or so."

"It is bad, senor chief," said Lute, coming forward.

At his voice the prisoner started, and turning quickly upon him, said savagely:

"What, you still alive, Lute Rollings?"

"I was in hopes you had been hanged years ago."

The renegade Texan's face turned pale as he heard the voice and seemed to recognize the speaker; but he answered sullenly:

"Yes, I'm still alive, Dan Hunter, and it's more than you'll be able to say to-morrow, I'm thinking."

"All right, Lute Rollings; but if I do die I won't be hanged for the crimes I have committed, as you were sentenced to be."

"Shut up, you white-haired old rascal," cried the guide, and turning to the Don he asked:

"Don Bocaro, do you know this man?"

Before the Don could reply Dan Hunter asked:

"Are you Don Bocaro?"

"I am so called."

"The chief of the Mexican bandits?"

"Yes."

"You don't look the devil men call him."

"Thank you; but who are you?"

"My name is Dan Hunter, and I am a ran chero."

"He belongs to the Rangers too, senor," put in Lute.

"Oh, yes, I am one of Sam Hall's Rangers, senor, and I am not ashamed of it."

"You are one of that band, you say?"

"I am."

"Do you know a boy in that command?"

"There are several youngsters with Cap'n Sam."

"I mean a boy by the name of Revolver Billy?"

"You bet I knows him."

"When did you see him last?"

"Three days ago."

"Where?"

"Over in Texas."

"Where is he now?"

"Don't tell me he is dead, senor, for I love that boy, and I risked my life to come over the river and try to save him."

"What is he to you?"

"My son."

"Ah! then I may as well tell you that he escaped last night, and is now back in Texas."

"Bully for Billy!" shouted the old man.

"Escaped, did you say?"

"Yes."

"He wasn't hurted?"

"No."

"And is now back in Texas?"

"Yes."

"Then you can jist slay me with the jaw-bone of a jackass, as Samson did the Philistines, whenever you get ready, for I'm play-

fully tickled to 'arn ther boy to safe," and the old Ranger showed it in his face that he was most delighted at the news he heard.

After some further conversation with his prisoner, Don Bocaro invited him to share his dinner with him, and then the command of outlaws were ordered on the march to their stronghold, where they arrived just as the sun touched the horizon in the west.

CHAPTER XVI.

REVOLVER BILLY SURPRISED.

As Billy rode along with the woman he had saved from death, he found her a most charming companion, though her sad eyes cut him to the heart whenever he met their gaze fastened full upon him.

Now and then he surprised her looking at him in a strange way, and seeing that he noticed it she said softly:

"You remind me of one who was very dear to me, and I cannot help but look at you, young senor."

"Oh, I'm a free show, senora, so look at me all you like, if you want to, and I'm sure your pretty face makes me eye you as close as a cat would a mouse."

"But is your home far from here?"

"Do you see yonder clump of trees?" and the woman pointed to a distant hill.

"Yes, senora."

"My hacienda is there—now look, and you will see its white walls glimmer in the sunlight."

"Yes, I see them, but they do say that Mexican robbers have their haunts in yonder hills."

"Yes, I have heard so."

"I don't suppose they trouble you, senora?"

"No."

"Well, you are in luck; but they make it pretty lively for Texans, I can tell you."

"Have you ever been in Mexico before?" asked the woman.

"Now I have, senora, and a fine country it would be if its people would take to work instead of stealing and killing folks, for a Mexican cannot rob a man unless he cuts his throat."

"You have a bad idea of our people."

"Well, I don't think so much of them, senora, and I have no reason to like them, as they raid my land often, I can tell you."

"Well, some day I hope this border warfare will be at an end on both sides of the Rio Grande."

"But see, I am almost home."

They were now ascending a steep trail, leading up the hill to a hacienda that was situated upon the summit of a forest-clad mound.

There were strong walls about the hacienda, and it, too, was strongly built, and Billy saw port-holes for rifles in both walls and house."

A strongly-made gate barred their progress, but this was thrown open at the call of the lady by a dark-faced, villainous-looking Mexican, who eyed Billy with a look that seemed hungry to kill him.

Crossing a plaza, the senora leaped from her horse at a door leading into the mansion, and threw her bridle-rein to a peon servant, while she said:

"Take the senor's steed also, Ventura, and see that he has every care."

Then turning to Billy she led him into the house, and, calling to a servant, had him show him to a room that certainly was most tempting in its air of luxury.

"Will the senor have anything?" asked the peon servant politely.

"The senor will not, for the Senor Billy has more now than he ever expected to get or deserves."

"The senor need but call, should he need wine or refreshments."

"The Senor Billy is a teetotally, having never tasted wine; but as for refreshments the senor will indulge."

The servant soon disappeared and soon returned with a silver platter with good things.

"The Senor Billy is 'way up in luck, and if he stays here long, eating such good things, he'll just be fat enough to kill," muttered Billy, and then turning to the servant he asked:

"What is your master's name?"

"Don Marko, senor."

"And the lady?"

"The Senora Lonita, senor."

"They are rich?"

"Yes, senor."

"Don't the bandits trouble them?"

"No, senor."

"Then I'm in luck, and I'll now take a siesta, after which the senora asked me to join her at supper."

"I will be here to lead the senor to the supper-room."

"You are right, for I'll get lost in the canyons of this hacienda, if I attempt to follow the trail alone."

"Now in a tepee or a one-room cabin, I'm at home; but here I'm off and need a guide."

As soon as the peon had departed, Billy laid down to rest, and was soon fast asleep.

It was nearly dark when he was awakened by the peon, who offered his services to aid him in dressing, and told him that the senora would wait for him in the supper-room.

"I'm able to dress myself, peon, and I hope to be for some years yet," answered Billy, and having "spruced up" as he called making his toilet, he followed the peon to the supper-room.

The lamps were already lighted, and the senora was looking like a queen, and greeted him most kindly.

Billy looked at her in utter admiration, and then tried to recall where he had seen her before, but could not do so.

As they sat at the table, a quick step was heard along the corridor leading to the supper-room, and the next moment in stepped a man booted, spurred, and looking like one who had ridden hard and seen hard service.

"Don Bocaro, the Bandit!"

Such were the words that broke from Billy's lips at sight of the man who had appeared so suddenly before him, while the Mexican cried in joyous tones:

"My boy captive, as I live!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BANDIT'S THREAT.

"WELL, my plucky boy, how is it I find you in my home and a guest at my table?" cried Don Bocaro, advancing and confronting the Boy Ranger.

"Is this your home?" asked Billy coolly.

"It is."

"Hooky! but you Mexican robbers live in high-toned style in this land of Greasers," said Billy.

"You do not answer my question, as to how you became a guest in my home?"

"Permit me to explain, Marko," and the senora advanced toward Don Bocaro, who greeted her most kindly and said:

"I am interested in knowing, Lonita."

"You know this youth then?"

"Yes."

"When, and how did you meet him?"

"We became acquainted at the muzzle of a revolver, some nights ago, Lonita, and he was my prisoner until last night, when he cleverly made his escape!"

"Ah! it was fortunate for me that he did escape, for, as I was taking my usual morning ride, I dashed upon a party of Indians who shot my horse and would have slain me had not this youth heard the firing and come upon the scene and rescued me."

"Ha! I owe him your life as well as my own, Lonita."

"You say he has saved your life, Don Bocaro, and yet was your prisoner?" asked the woman, with considerable surprise in tone and manner.

"Yes, Lonita, such was the case."

"Was it not a strange way to treat one to whom you owed your life?"

"Perhaps so; but he is a Texan Ranger."

"He is but a boy."

"True, yet can do as much deadly work in a short time as any man I ever met."

"Yes, my own experience tells me that; but, senor, are you a Ranger?" and the woman turned to Billy.

"I am, senora, a member of Captain Sam Hall's Rangers."

"And you are a Texan?"

"Yes, senora."

"Why did you come to Mexico?"

"The Don brought me as a prisoner, and then I returned as your escort, senora."

"True, and you must be permitted to go free at your will."

"To bring his Ranger comrades upon us some night, Lonita?"

"But he will not do that," urged the woman, but Billy said quickly, in his blunt way:

"Don't fool yourself, senora, for if that man is Don Bocaro, the Bandit, he is just the individual the boys from over the Rio Grande would like to get hold of."

"Ah! they seek revenge?"

"That is it."

"But has not my brother cause to seek revenge against 'Texans?' and the woman spoke almost fiercely.

"Is Don Bocaro your brother, senora?"

"Yes, he is my twin brother."

"That is what puzzled me when I saw you, to tell where I had seen you before, senora; but, if he is your brother, he is a very wicked man."

"No, he is not wicked, but just, for he seeks revenge against them who have wronged him, have bitterly wronged me and mine," and the woman spoke in a voice that quivered as she vainly strove to hide the emotion that seemed almost to overpower her.

"And Texans have thus harmed you, senora?"

"Yes."

"They were a wicked lot."

"They were Rangers."

"No, senora."

"I say yes."

"Senora, Texan Rangers protect women, never harm them."

"Boy, you do not know them if you say this, for I tell you that I have been bitterly wronged by Texan Rangers, and it was to avenge my wrongs that my brother has made war against them."

"You call him a robber, a bandit, and say he is merciless."

"But you know him as little as you know your own Rangers if you say that, for he strikes only at men, he avenges me and mine, and he destroys only those who were guilty."

"See, this is his home, and mine, and it seems a happy one; but, young senor, the shadow of sadness rests upon it, the shadow of an awful crime, and your Rangers are the guilty ones."

"But come, let us not talk of this, for you saved my life, and my brother's, and you are a guest, and upon you shall not be visited the

sins of those who were guilty because you bear their hated name.

"Come, be our guest for the night, and with the morrow depart for your home."

Revolver Billy was deeply impressed with the manner and words of the beautiful woman.

He could not believe however that her charges against the Rangers were true.

How they had wronged her she had not said; but, from what he had known of the different Ranger bands, they were very different from what her accusations made them.

He could not also understand how it was that Don Bocaro, a man branded upon Texas soil as a bandit, could live in Mexico as a seemingly honest *haciendero*.

That he was no ordinary man he had already discovered, and his surroundings, and the beautiful woman who called herself his sister, showed him to have been born to wealth and refinement.

His revenge against the Texans, from his sister's words, he could now understand, and, in striving to recall any act of robbery, or the killing of the helpless, he failed to do so, although he had long heard of Don Bocaro as a merciless robber.

Under the circumstances, the boy's pride would not allow him to accept hospitality beneath a roof where his comrades were accused of foul crimes, and where he felt that he could not be welcome, although he had saved the lives of those who stood before him, so he said quickly:

"Well, senora, some day I hope you will find out that Texan Rangers are not as bad as you paint them."

"But I will not anger you by defending them, but bid you farewell, and return to those whom you so condemn and hate."

"One minute, senor," said the Don stepping forward.

"Well, Don Bocaro?"

"Are you aware that you are my prisoner?"

"No, for I escaped from you."

"And have again placed yourself in the lion's den."

"I came here as the protector of that lady, your sister."

"It matters not, young senor, you are my prisoner."

"You hear, senora, what your brother says, and yet you accuse Texans of crime," cried Billy bitterly.

"Yes, and I am surprised to hear my brother say that he holds as prisoner, one to whom he owes his life, as I do mine."

"I admit my indebtedness, Senor Billy; but still I must keep you here, for I have work for you to do."

"For me, Don Bocaro?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You are poor?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am rich, very rich."

"You ought to be, after all men say you have robbed Texans of," bluntly said Billy.

The Don's dark face flushed at this, and then paled, while he said with hasty tone:

"Did I rob them of their gold and their lives, I could not do worse than they did to me and mine.

"But enough of the past, for it is to the future I turn, and I wish you to aid me."

"How?"

"I will make you rich if you will do as I ask you."

"I've got no desire to be rich; but what do you ask?"

"Do you know a ranchero by the name of Alden?"

"Clement Alden?"

"Yes."

"I know him."

"He lives on his ranch, I believe?"

"Yes, and he has a fine ranch too, but he is like you, it does not seem to make him happy."

"And no wonder; but, boy, if you will guide me and my men to that man's ranch, and aid me to capture him, or if you will arrange to get him into my power. I'll make you rich in gold."

"I don't sell human life for gold, Don Bocaro," hotly said Billy, angry at the thought of being suspected to be one who would betray a friend.

"What is he to you?"

"I know him, and he always speaks a kind word to me when I see him."

"And you refuse to do as I ask?"

"Most certainly."

"You are in my power, remember."

"All right, Don."

"I will force you to do so."

"I rather think not."

"Do you, boy, put your will against me, a man?"

"I've tried lead and steel with men, Don Bocaro, and I still live."

"You shall die, unless you do as I command you."

"I'd rather die, than have the Rangers say I did a mean act against one of my own people.

"I don't know what your quarrel with Mr. Clement Alden is, but you can't use me to help you kill him, Don Bocaro."

"You shall aid me."

"I won't, and that is flat-footed."

"Boy, I like you, and I do not wish to take harsh measures with you."

"I was on my way to find Alden's ranch, when you run into our camp.

"I was under the guidance of a man I do not wholly trust, and I saw in you, young as you are, one who could serve me well.

"You are a mere boy now, with few attachments, poor and houseless; but if you do as I ask you I will be as a father to you, and my sister will adopt you as her son, for already you have won a strong hold upon our affections.

"Clement Alden has wronged us deeply, and I seek revenge upon him, so be my guide to his ranch, and you shall become one of our household."

"No, sir, I'm not the boy for your dirty work, and did I aid you, there is one dear old man who calls me his son, who would cast me out from his heart forever, while the boys would set me down as worse than a Greaser."

"Is the old man you speak of a Ranger?"

"He is."

"With white hair and beard?"

"Yes."

"His name is Hunter?"

"Yes, but we call him Grandpop; but do you know him?"

"Yes."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In my camp this morning."

"What! did he come there?" asked Billy quickly.

"He was brought there as a prisoner."

Billy tried to speak, but could not, and his face grew deadly pale, while Don Bocaro, with a quiet smile went on:

"Yes, it seems that he was on your trail, intending to rescue you, and in crossing the Rio Grande, he was lariatied by my men."

"Oh, Lordy! poor Grandpop," gasped Billy, while Don Bocaro said sternly:

"Now, Senor Billy, you love this old man, and I tell you frankly he shall die, if you do not do as I ask."

"No! no! no!" groaned Billy, his heart almost bursting at this terrible threat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BILLY MAKES UP HIS MIND.

It was a bitter shock to poor Billy, to find that the old Ranger was a prisoner in the hands of Don Bocaro.

And to think that he was there in trying to rescue him was a fearful thought.

After the terrible threat of the chief, Billy controlled his emotion as soon as he could, and said:

"Do you mean this, senor?"

"I certainly do."

"You would force me to do an act of dishonor to save the life of that dear old man?"

"I would force you to place in my power a

man whom I have sworn to kill, and who is deserving of the worst death I could bring upon him."

"Why not go to his home, and demand him to meet you like a man?"

"And have him turn me over to your Ranger comrades, who would hang me to the nearest tree?"

Billy saw the truth of this remark, so remained quiet, for he well understood that Captain Sam and his men would make very short work of Don Bocaro, the Bandit.

"Well, I cannot help you, senor," he said, sadly.

"You will either help me, or your old father must die."

"Where is he?"

"In a cell in one wing of this hacienda."

"Can I see him?"

"No."

"Well, do your worst, Don Bocaro, for I am not one to beg mercy of a man who has a heart of stone."

"I will give you forty-eight hours to consider."

"I don't need it; but I'll take the time," and Billy added the latter, as it flashed upon him that forty-eight hours were a long time in which to plot an escape.

"You shall have the time."

"And what will you do with me?"

"Put you in a cell, too."

"Correct; I am ready."

"Then follow me," and Don Bocaro led the way from the room, while Billy did not even glance at the beautiful woman who stood like a statue gazing after him.

The Bocaro hacienda was a strong structure; in fact, it would have made a very passable fort, and from the olden times, added to, strengthened, and made almost a fortification, it was really nothing more than a fort.

A part of the structure, the right wing, was reserved for the family, and herein those who dwelt there were made most comfortable.

Then the center structure was the quarter where the men dwelt, and the end wing was made into a prison, store houses, and quarters for the servants.

Around the strong abode was an adobe wall, with a scaffold running along inside, just the height for a man to stand and look over.

A small piece of artillery here and there, double gates, and with acres surrounding of rich grass, and water in plenty for horses and cattle, rendered the place a fortification, in fact.

How many men the Don had, no one seemed to know, though there were those who said, counting cowboys, servants, and his mounted escort, that he could show a hundred fighters to defend his place.

And how the Don reconciled his acts to his

Government no one could distinctly understand; but, as his depredations were not made on Mexican soil, it did not concern those in authority, and among officials he seemed to be looked upon as a personage of considerable importance.

Of course rumors were current of his deeds on the Texas border; but the officers of the law received no complaints, and consequently took no notice of talk.

To the ordinary observer the hacienda seemed the home of a wealthy Mexican, who, living in an age of danger, and out of the pale of official protection, was forced to protect himself as best he could.

To the wing reserved as the prison, Don Bocaro took Revolver Billy.

Taking a key from his belt, he unlocked a strong, iron-barred door, and said simply:

"I am sorry to put you in here, but I must do so."

"I hope that in the time I give you, you will decide to do as I ask."

Billy made no immediate reply, glanced into the room, which had a window in the roof, and the open door, as the only means of ventilation and light, and stepped within.

There was a hammock swinging across the room, a chair, a table and nothing more.

"Oh, this is not bad; I have seen worse," said Billy in a cheery way, as though not caring for an apology for his quarters.

"I hope the quarters will not have to be lessened down to the size a man needs when dead," most significantly remarked the Don.

"I am ready to take any accommodations which I cannot avoid," replied Billy, and then the door was closed upon him and the key turned in the lock.

As the Don departed with the lantern, Billy threw himself into the hammock, and began to think.

He felt that the Don was a dangerous man if aroused to act.

He knew that the old Ranger was in durance vile, and on his account.

If he could make terms with the Don, it would save his life and that of the old Ranger.

To make those terms he must betray a Texan, one whom he had ever liked, and against whom he had not heard one unkind word, until breathed from the lips of Don Bocaro.

How the Texan Ranchero, Clement Alden, had harmed the Don and his family, Billy could not know.

But that he had done so was very evident, else why the desire of the bandit chief, yes, and his sister too, for revenge, and a fearful revenge at that?

By giving Clement Alden into the power of the Don, he could save his life, and that of old Dan Hunter.

But, to do so he must betray a Texan, and

at the same time put a load on his conscience which could not be shaken off.

Billy was a boy, but he had a man's head upon his young shoulders.

He thought deeply, and all these things he reviewed slowly as he lay in his hammock.

Life was dear to him in spite of his recklessness, and Old Dan's life was just as dear.

But he at last decided what he should do.

Having made up his mind to his course, he quietly dropped off to sleep, as though no weight was upon his heart, no dread flashing through his brain.

CHAPTER XIX.

SEARCHING INFORMATION UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

BILLY awoke in the morning at a late hour, for he was really worn out, and soon after a peon servant came to his cell with a most tempting breakfast.

"I came before, senor, but told the Don that you were sleeping, and he would not let me disturb you."

"He is very kind," said Billy and then, as the man unlocked the door and came in, he sat down to the table with a relish for his breakfast.

It was well served and most tempting, and the hungry boy ate with a relish in spite of his being behind iron bars.

After a while he said:

"Peon, are there any other prisoners here?"

"I do not know, senor."

"You surely know if there is a white-haired Texan here?"

"No, senor."

"Can you find out?"

"No, senor."

"Why not?"

"Don Bocaro does not tell his peons."

"Have you no eyes?"

"No, senor, if the Don says no."

"Ah! can you see that?" and Billy placed a gold-piece in his hand.

"No, senor."

"You feel it?"

"No, senor."

"You shall have double."

But the peon laid the gold upon the table and said simply:

"No, senor."

"I've got more."

"I'm glad, senor."

"You shall have ten of these pieces of gold if you will find out if Don Bocaro has a gray-haired Texan a prisoner here."

"No, senor."

"Name your price."

"I have no price, senor."

"Are all the Don's men like you?"

"Yes, senor."

"They are treasures."

"Yes, senor."

"Where is the Don?"

"In the hacienda, senor."

"And the senora?"

"The Senora Lonita is in the hacienda, also, senor."

"I could have guessed that much."

"Yes, senor."

"Peon, you are a fool."

"Yes, senor."

"A most arrant fool, to work here as a slave, when you can get gold and go with me."

"Yes, senor."

"Do you still wish to remain a fool?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then I like wise associates, so get out."

"Yes, senor," and the peon took up the waiter and departed.

The morning dragged slowly along to Billy, and then came his dinner, this time brought by another peon.

Instantly Billy gazed into his face, and then said:

"Who sent me this dinner?"

"The Don ordered it, senor."

"The Don is a kind master?"

"He is, senor."

"You are a slave?"

"I am, senor."

"How would you like to be a free man?"

"I prefer to be Don Bocaro's slave, senor."

"That settles that, and you are another fool in his service."

"Yes, senor."

"Are there many prisoners in the hacienda?"

"I do not know, senor."

"Have you seen a white-haired Texan here?"

"No, senor."

"Have you heard of such a man being here?"

"No, senor."

"Could you find out for me?"

"What, senor?"

"If there was a Texan Ranger here?"

"You are a Texan Ranger, senor."

"Ah, you know that much, do you?"

"Yes, senor."

"Now tell me if there is another."

"I do not know, senor."

"Can you find out?"

The peon shook his head.

"Do you know what that is?" and Billy put some pieces of gold into the peon's hand.

"Yes, senor."

"Well, it shall be yours, if you find out for me if there is a Texan here who is called Old Dan Hunter."

"I cannot find out, senor."

"Then, good afternoon, and don't stay here, for I wish to eat my dinner in peace."

The peon disappeared, and Revolver Billy quietly ate his dinner.

Then a peon came for the dishes.

It was a different man from those who had come before.

Instantly Billy began on him with:

"Well, peon, are you not tired of living the life of a slave?"

"No, senor."

"Oh, you like it, do you?"

"Yes, senor."

"Don Bocaro is a good master, then?"

"He is very kind, senor."

"Now I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, senor."

"Go to the cell where an old Ranger is kept, and tell him to ask Don Bocaro to let him have a talk with me."

"I cannot, senor."

"Do you not know his cell?"

"No, senor."

"Do you not know the Texan?"

"No, senor."

"I will give you a handful of gold to do this for me."

"No, senor."

"I want you to carry a message to the Don for me."

"No, senor."

"Then to the Senora Lonita."

"I cannot, senor."

"Can you get out?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then travel," and Billy sprung to his feet, and out skipped the peon with the dinner dishes.

"That beats all.

"I wonder if I were here a month if the Don would send a different peon every day at meal-time!"

"Well, I will see what supper brings around."

And supper brought another peon.

"Well, my man, you are welcome, for I am hungry."

"Yes, senor."

"How is the Don?"

"I do not know, senor."

"And the senorita?"

"I do not know, senor."

"What do you know?"

"I do not know, senor."

"Will you take a message to the Don for me?"

"No, senor."

"Will you, for this handful of gold, take a message to the white-haired Texan who is a prisoner here?"

"No, senor."

"Well, take those dishes and get out."

The peon obeyed, and Billy was again alone, after a day of searching for information under difficulties.

CHAPTER XX.

A WOMAN'S WORK.

BILLY was in trouble. He had failed in his inquiries and attempted negotiations with the peons.

What was left to him he did not know, other than to await the elapse of the forty-eight hours and see what would then turn up.

His iron door he knew it would be impossible to force open.

To knock the peon over and go out, would be but to run into the hands of others who were doubtless on guard.

But this he had made up his mind to do; if he could not tempt the last peon who brought him his supper the next night, he would make a bold stroke for liberty come what might.

Again he sought his hammock and became lost in deep thought.

Presently the grating of the iron door was darkened by a human form.

"Well, who are you?" asked Billy.

"I am your friend," was the low response.

"Friends are scarce in these quarters."

"Still I am your friend."

"Prove it, pard," answered Billy, in a whisper, for so the visitor had spoken.

"Before long I will return and prove it."

"Good!" and Billy was once more alone.

An hour passed, and then to the anxiously watching and waiting boy, another form appeared.

"Back again?" he asked, coolly.

"Yes."

Then there was a key placed in the lock, and the door swung open.

In stepped a form with a cloak wrapped about it.

"Who are you?" asked Billy.

"Lonita," was the low reply.

"The Senora Lonita?"

"Yes."

"Why have you come here?"

"To set you free."

"Bravo! I'm willing to go; but I thought you were my foe."

"The foe of Texans I am; but not your enemy."

"You are very kind, senora; but where is the Don?"

"Gone to see the *alcade* in the next village."

"And you are setting me free without his knowledge?"

"Yes."

"You will get into trouble."

"No."

"Are you sure, senora?"

"Yes."

"But how am I to go?"

"I have a disguise for you to put on."

"Well, I'll do as you say."

"Then put this on and follow me."

"But my friend?"

"Whom?"

"The Texan Ranger."

"I can do nothing for him."

"He is a prisoner here?"

"Yes."

"He must go with me."

"No."

"Yes, senora."

"It is impossible."

"Then I will not go."

"You must."

"I will not."

"You will lose your life."

"And so will Old Dan."

"He is near his grave now."

"I don't care for that, for if he does not go with me I stay here."

"I cannot release him."

"Then leave me here, senora."

"Are you determined?"

"Yes, senora, for, much as I thank you for your kindness, I will not leave without Grandpop."

The woman seemed troubled, and then said:

"I will release him another time."

"Then I will wait."

She saw that the boy was determined, and said:

"Wait until I return."

"I will do what I can."

"Oh thank you, senora."

She departed from the cell, and the moments seemed hours to the waiting boy.

At last she entered, and she was not alone.

A man in the garb of a padre was with her.

"Here, put this costume on," she said.

Billy eyed her companion.

He was not going to be deceived, so he said quietly:

"Padre Dan, is that you?"

"It are," was the calm reply. "We are in luck."

"You bet."

"Silence!" said the Senora Lonita peremptorily, and then she led the way, as soon as Billy had donned his garb, which was also that of a priest.

She led them directly to her own quarters, and then said:

"You must pass the guard at the gate; but I sent two peons out to come in with padres' garb, so you will not be questioned."

"Your horses are in the corral, and a peon awaits outside to conduct you there, but you must ride these burros out."

"Here is food for you, and your weapons."

"Adios!"

The senora quickly turned and disappeared, and Billy and Old Dan, in their garb of priests,

lost no time in mounting the donkeys awaiting them.

They found the guard at the gate, Old Dan giving them his blessing, and once outside they found the peon, who took their donkeys and led them to where their horses were to be found.

They were soon saddled and bridled, and the two Rangers mounting in haste were soon on their way toward the nearest ford of the Rio Grande.

"Waal, Billy, this are a sensation," said Old Dan, as they felt that they were free.

"It is for a fact, Grandpop."

"I must git this parson's outfit off my old bones, or I'll go to preachin' sure," and Old Dan threw off his padre's garb.

"Better leave it on, Grandpop, until we cross the river, as it may serve us a good turn."

"Sheep's wool never did no wolf any sarvice, boy Billy."

"We don't look becomin' in it, and I says, take it off, and then we kin git ther swing at our weepin's."

"All right, Grandpop," and Billy cast aside his priestly attire.

"Now to hear about your adventures, Grandpop," he said.

The old Ranger soon told his story, and then heard the boy's narrative in return.

Having now crossed the Rio Grande, they hunted up the camp of Captain Sam and his Rangers, and after a consultation together, it was decided to make no move for the present against Don Bocaro, and the band of Texans started upon their return homeward.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN TO MEXICO.

NOT far from the regular rendezvous of the Texan Rangers under Sam Hall was a vast ranch, the owner of which was said to be a very wealthy man.

His cattle roamed over thousands of acres, his ponies were numbered by many hundreds, and he employed almost a battalion of cowboys and servants on his estates.

The hacienda was a grand mansion in its way, especially for that far border, and it was furnished with absolute luxury.

Of the rancho little was known other than that he had come to Texas some years before and established himself there, while he seemed to have unlimited means.

He was popular with the Rangers, was liked by other rancheros, and those under him spoke of him most kindly.

This man was seated under the shade of some trees before his hacienda one pleasant afternoon, idly puffing at a cigar, and watching the smoke curl above his head.

He was a man of fine presence, tall, broad-shouldered, athletic, and dressed in a suit of light flannel.

His face was shaded by a sombrero, but it showed resolution, while his features were well cut, and his eyes intensely expressive.

Presently he beheld two horsemen approaching the hacienda, and merely muttered:

"Rangers."

As they approached, they turned their horses loose and advanced toward him.

The ranchero arose to greet them with courtly grace.

They were old Dan Hunter and Revolver Billy.

"Senor Alden, I have come to see you upon an important matter," said Billy.

"Be seated, gentlemen, and whatever your errand you are welcome, as Rangers ever are."

"You may have heard, sir, of my capture by Don Bocaro and his men?" said Billy.

"Yes, my cowboy chief was telling of it, and I congratulate you upon your escape."

"Thank you, sir; but may I ask if you know Don Bocaro?"

"I knew a Don Bocaro, Billy, years ago; but it cannot be that he has turned out to be an outlaw."

"Describe him, please, Mr. Alden."

The ranchero was silent an instant, while a look of deep sadness spread over his face.

After a while he said:

"He was a Mexican, above the average in size, with a face almost womanly in its beauty, and yet was every inch a man."

"I think the one you knew, sir, and my captor, are one and the same."

"I sincerely hope not."

"Had he any cause to hate you, Mr. Alden, may I ask?"

"No; but on the contrary, I felt that he had wronged me."

"This is strange, sir; but I will tell to you just what I know, and Grandpop here alone has heard it from me, as I deemed it best to speak to you upon the subject."

"And I told Billy, he had better do so, for if you were the man the Don made you out, you didn't look it, and your face was a lie," bluntly said Old Dan.

"I beg of you, gentlemen, to speak out to me, that I may know of what I am accused," said Mr. Alden.

In a few words, distinctly, and telling all as it happened, Billy told the story of his capture, his escape, his rescue of the Senora Lonita, and then his recapture, or rather imprisonment at the hacienda.

Clement Alden turned to the hue of death as he listened, and several times essayed to speak, yet seemed unable to find words.

At last he sprung to his feet and paced

excitedly to and fro, the Rangers watching him the while with deep interest.

At last he became perfectly calm and said:

"Billy, this is a most mysterious and remarkable story that you tell, and I have a plan to propose to you."

"Well, sir?"

"You are getting old, Grandpop!"

"I hain't young, sir."

"You need a home and comforts in your old age, and a nice ranch, with cattle you can look at?"

"I has a leetle suthin' o' ther kind."

"But you wish more, and some one to leave it to when you die."

"Now, there is Billy, and he can live with you and be your heir."

"Yes, sir."

"I have a fine ranch, with horses, cattle and all, some fifty miles from here, which I will give to you and to Billy, and it shall be pay for some work I wish you to do for me."

"All right, sir."

"Now all I ask is that both of you go with me to Mexico."

"To Mexico?"

"Yes."

"But you will be killed, sir," said Billy.

"I will take all chances, and you must guide me direct to the Bocaro hacienda."

"But, sir—"

"Now no excuses, Billy, if I am willing to take the risks."

"Last night I had some trouble here with a stranger, and as he is a Mexican, I wish to carry him with us, so just say when you will start."

"After all that I have told you, you wish to go?"

"Yes, Billy."

"They'll skin yer, pard."

"I'll risk it, Dan."

"Then I likes yer narva."

"And will go?"

"I'll do it."

"And you, Billy?"

"I am at your service, Mr. Alden."

"Then return to your camp, get leave of absence from Captain Hall, and come here to-morrow night prepared to go."

In surprise the two Rangers departed, discussing the remarkably strange freak of the ranchero as they rode along, and, getting leave they returned on time to the hacienda.

Mr. Alden was ready for the start, and he had with him a man who wore a mask, and was ironed heavily.

"We are ready, Billy," said the ranchero.

"Any one else, sir?"

"No, lead on!"

Then the four men rode away from the hacienda, and two days after crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico.

CHAPTER XXII.

BILLY BRINGS ABOUT A STRANGE SCENE.

THE guard at the Bocaro hacienda, was somewhat startled one evening, just at sunset, to behold Revolver Billy the Boy Ranger ride up to the portal and ask for the Don.

"He is in his quarters, senor."

"I wish to see him."

Billy was admitted, and soon after he was face to face with Don Bocaro.

"Well, senor, are you back here, after all that has passed?" he said sternly.

"Yes, this is me."

"From the night of your escape I have not spoken to my sister, after her act."

"You are wrong, and she is wise, for I am back again."

"And for what reason?"

"To bring you your foe."

"Hal Clement Alden?" cried the Don excitedly.

"Yes, senor."

"Where is he?"

"I have him in safety."

"And you have brought him here to me?"

"Yes, Old Dan Hunter, the Ranger, and myself."

"Bring him here at once."

"No, for I wish terms."

"Name your price, boy."

"I do not ask gold, senor."

"What then?"

"I wish you to pledge yourself to hear what Mr. Alden has to say."

"Well."

"Let me bring him here to this room, and have your sister here also."

"Let him tell his story and then you can act."

"This is fair."

"Do you promise?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go and get him."

"But there will be one other besides Mr. Alden, Old Dan and myself."

"Who is that other?"

"Wait and see."

"Boy, you do not mean to trifle with me?"

"Am I a fool to trust myself in your power without cause?"

"I trust you, so go and fetch the prisoner."

Billy departed from the hacienda and was gone nearly an hour.

Then he returned, and he was accompanied by Old Dan, Mr. Alden and the masked man in iron.

Into the room they went, and there sat Don Bocaro and the Senora Lonita.

Both were very pale and seemed to control their emotion only by the greatest effort, while Rancho Alden was colorless, stern and calm.

The Senora Lonita bowed to Billy as he entered, and then her eyes fell upon the rancho.

The Don eyed each one of the party quickly and then said:

"Senor Alden, we meet again."

"Yes, after many years," was the reply.

"You have something to say, the Boy Ranger tells me?"

"Yes; I beg you to patiently hear my story."

"We will listen."

"You remember that years ago, almost a score now, I met you in the City of Mexico, Don Bocaro?"

"Yes, and I have bitterly cursed the day that I owed you my life," savagely responded the Don.

"You treated me with kindness, took me to your home, and there I met your twin sister, then sixteen."

"I loved her, and she professed love for me."

"We were secretly engaged, for your father refused to allow her to marry an American, and he desired to wed her to a rich young Cuban."

"One night I received a letter from her, telling me she was to marry my rival, and to give her up."

"I found that she was really married, and I did give her up and left Mexico."

"Long after I learned that she was separated from her husband, and that he had turned out to be a wretch of the worst kind."

"I settled in Texas, and I did not hear of the Senora Lonita again until this brave boy visited me, after his escape from here, and told me that you were a bandit chief, lived in your stronghold hacienda, and your sister dwelt with you."

"More, he told me that you had turned against all Texans because I was one."

"That I had, in revenge for losing your sister, with a band of Rangers crossed the Rio Grande, raided your home, killed your parents, carried the Senora Lonita's child away to put it to death, and, after burning your home, slaying your servants, and driving off your cattle, I had returned to Texas."

"You and your sister were away that night, and thus escaped, and you both vowed eternal vengeance against all Texans."

"Then I was told that you rebuilt your home, made it the stronghold it is, and organizing a band of men, began to wage war against Texans."

"I had often heard of Don Bocaro, the Bandit, but little dreamed that you were that man."

"And now you come here to face me after your crimes!" said Don Bocaro, in a voice quivering with passion.

"I came here, senor, to tell you that I have never seen Mexico since I left it when the Senora Lonita married another—"

"Ha! do you dare—"

"I dare tell you that the man who did you this foul wrong was the husband of your sister."

"He it was who did the deed, and laid it at my door, and since then he has been known as the Texas Tiger, a leader of a band of cut-throats, and he well deserves the name."

"He came to my ranch to rob me, but was betrayed by one of his men, and he is now in my power."

"See, do you recognize him?"

Ranchero Alden tore the mask from the face of his prisoner, and both Don Bocaro and Lonita uttered a cry of horror, while the Don asked:

"Man, is this true?"

"Yes," was the response of the man, whose eyes glittered maliciously.

"Oh! but I will have a fearful revenge on you."

"No, for the Senor Alden has pledged me, for telling the truth, that he will give me up to the Mexican military to be shot," was the cool response.

Then Lonita looked up into the face of the Texas ranchero and said softly:

"Forgive me!"

"Yes, everything I forgive, and more, Lonita, I have traced your child for you."

"See, there he stands in that noble boy!"

A wild cry from the mother and her arms were around the neck of Revolver Billy, who had already heard the story of his life, and aided Mr. Alden in tracing out his parentage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

A FEW words will conclude my story of Revolver Billy, who is now a wealthy ranchero in Texas, dwelling not far from the Alden ranch, where Mr. Alden and his beautiful wife, once the Senora Lonita, live in happiness together, after their many years of sorrow.

The Texan Tiger, Miranda, was tried by the Mexicans and shot, dying the hardened wretch he was.

Don Bocaro still lives upon his hacienda, but is no longer called a bandit, and the Rangers are now his friends.

As for Old Dan Hunter, he died peacefully in bed, at Billy's ranch, and "not with his boots on," as he expected to die, and his "toes turn up" beneath a handsome monument which Billy erected to his memory, and upon it is engraven:

SACRED TO THE REMEMBRANCE
OF
DAN HUNTER,

A Texan Ranger and a True Man.

ERECTED BY HIS BOY PARD

REVOLVER BILLY.

THE END.

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